

THE ARGOSY.

DECEMBER, 1890.

THE HOUSE OF HALLIWELL.

BY MRS. HENRY WOOD, AUTHOR OF "EAST LYNNE."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

LADY ELLIOT'S PLEADING.

SIR Thomas Elliot had gone steaming up to London.

It happened to be a slow train, stopping at every station, which drove the physician into a fever nearly as great as that of the poor lady he had been to visit, he was so intensely eager to meet his wife. A compliment he had not paid her of recent years.

Lady Elliot seized with avidity upon the information. It was a pretext for *demanding* of William to break off the match. "Of course," she said, "he will not think of entering upon the connection now."

A presentiment struck Hester that something was wrong when Ann went into the school-room and said Sir Thomas Elliot wanted her. These presentiments do come across us sometimes, without our knowing why or wherefore. Do they ever fail of being borne out? They never did with Hester. Surely there was nothing unusual, nothing to create surprise or uneasiness in Sir Thomas Elliot's paying a morning visit to the Miss Halliwells, connected as the families were about to be; yet, before Hester reached the drawing-room door, all that was to take place seemed to flash upon her. Sir Thomas turned at her entrance, and prefixed what he had to say by stating that he had been called to Middlebury the previous day on professional business.

"I am aware of it," answered Hester. "Mr. William took tea with us last evening, and mentioned that you were gone there."

"How did he know it?" growled Sir Thomas under his breath. "Called in and heard it from his mother, I suppose. Well, madam, to be brief—for I have patients waiting for me now at home and knew not how to spare time for coming here—I am concerned to tell you that I received an account of the late Dr. Goring ('Doctor,' as I hear him universally called, though I find he was only a general practitioner) which has considerably surprised me."

"In what way, sir?" asked Hester, with outward calmness, though her heart was fluttering sadly.

"Why, madam, can you be ignorant that—you must pardon my speaking plainly, I only repeat the statement as it was given to me—that Dr. Goring was suspected of having poisoned his wife?"

"Oh, sir!" interrupted Hester, "do not, I beseech you, speak so injuriously of the dead. Dr. Goring was an honourable man, of a kind, good nature, a gentleman and a scholar, one not capable of so dreadful a crime. I am cognisant of all the particulars, and I assert that whoever accused Dr. Goring of killing her was guilty of a wicked calumny."

"But he *was* suspected?" urged Sir Thomas.

"Not by those who knew him, and knew the circumstances."

"There was someone else mixed up in the affair, a governess?"

"Unhappily there was," answered Hester. "Say, rather, the author of it all, Sir Thomas," she added with emphasis. "But I must only say this in a whisper, and to you."

"Who afterwards became Dr. Goring's wife?" continued Sir Thomas, looking steadfastly at Hester.

"I am ashamed to say she did."

"Well, madam, this is just what I have heard. We will not differ about minor details, the facts are the same. Under the circumstances, you cannot wonder that I have forbidden my son to think more of Miss Goring."

"Oh, Sir Thomas Elliot!" exclaimed Hester. "It will be a cruel thing!"

"I hope not. I do not wish to hurt the young lady's feelings more than is unavoidable; and I cast no reproach upon *her*. I believe her to be, personally, most estimable. Still I must have due consideration for my son's honour and for that of his family; and a young lady liable to be pointed at as—as—in short, as the daughter of Dr. Goring of Middlebury, cannot be eligible to become William Elliot's wife."

He said more, but Hester was too grieved, too stunned, to hear clearly what it was. Nothing could soften the bare and abrupt fact that he peremptorily broke off the negotiation for an alliance with Mary Goring. She watched him get into his carriage from the window, her heart painfully failing her. *How* was she to break it to Mary?

That same day, a little later, William Elliot sat with his mother in her morning room. Marks of agitation were on both countenances; and to little wonder; for she was seconding what her husband had previously said to him, indignantly forbidding his intended marriage, and he listened in a state of rebellion, as indignantly remonstrating. Never, until now, had William Elliot been aroused to anger against his parents: he was not only a dutiful son, but fondly attached to them.

"Why persist in attributing our conduct to caprice, when we are only actuated by a desire for your honour and happiness?" urged Lady Elliot. "There is no help for it, William. You cannot marry one whose father's name was stained with sin."

"I have made it my business to inquire into the particulars of the prejudice against Dr. Goring," returned Mr. Elliot. "When my father stated to me, last night, what he had heard at Middlebury, I determined to seek out a fellow I know, who comes from there. Stone, his name is; he is reading for the Bar; his chambers are next to mine, in Lincoln's Inn. I have been with him this morning and heard the details of the affair, perhaps more fully than my father did; and I would stake my life on Dr. Goring's innocence."

"As if a London law-student, young and credulous as yourself, could know anything of such particulars!" slightly spoke Lady Elliot.

"He was at home when it happened," retorted William, his pale face flushing with pain at his mother's tone. "His father, Stone of Middlebury, was solicitor to Dr. Goring; they lived within a few doors of each other; the families were on terms of intimacy, and young Stone knows all, even to the minute details. Do not cast ridicule upon what I say, mother. Dr. Goring was a cruelly aspersed man."

"No," said her ladyship.

"Yes," persisted Mr. Elliot. "Were I a perfectly uninterested party, I should say the same. I look at the facts dispassionately, and my reason tells me so."

"How very obstinate you are, William! Do you dispute that Mrs. Goring died the death she did?"

"No. On that point, unhappily, there is no room for doubt."

"Or that someone residing in the house must have dealt her death out to her?"

"So it would seem."

"Then who was that person?"

"Not her husband. There was another."

"The governess. But Dr. Goring afterwards made that woman his second wife. Was there no crime, no dishonour in that, William?"

William Elliot sat silent, his brow contracting. "He cannot be defended there: it was an unseemly connection: but Dr. Goring never would, or did, credit aught against her, and his having made her his wife proves that. He was a most honourable-minded, kind man, and a universal favourite. I tell you what, mother—had you and Sir Thomas not been secretly averse to my marriage yourselves, I should never have had Dr. Goring's conduct brought up as a plea against it."

"You are prejudiced and unjust," said Lady Elliot. "If we argue until night we shall not agree."

"I am sorry for that," observed William. "For, if so, only one course is open to me."

"What is that?" cried Lady Elliot, quickly.

"Though I assure you, my dearest mother, it will be with the very utmost reluctance that I adopt it.—That of marrying without your consent."

Lady Elliot half sprang from her seat, and a sound of pain, too sharp for a groan, escaped her.

"My happiness, my very life, are bound up in Miss Goring," he resumed. "To separate us now, after allowing the intimacy, sanctioning the measures for our marriage, would be cruel injustice. I will not submit to it."

"William," she uttered, in visible agitation, "you cannot marry in defiance of your father and mother. You dare not."

"Not without deliberation, and in grief and great repugnance, have I formed the resolution: but I owe a duty to Miss Goring as well as to my father and mother. The proposed allowance to me I shall not expect or ask for. The house I have taken I must give up, and look out for a smaller one; and we must make my own income suffice for our wants, until I can bring my profession into use."

"You speak of duty to Miss Goring," she resumed, with emotion: "have you forgotten that to your parents lies your first and foremost duty? A duty ordained of God?"

"Mother, I have forgotten nothing. I have debated the question with myself upon all points. And I believe that I am doing right in marrying."

"In defiance," she repeated, "of your father and mother? *In defiance?*"

"I am sorry that they drive me to it."

For several minutes Lady Elliot's agitation had been increasing, and it appeared, now, to rise beyond control. Two crimson spots shone on her pale cheeks, her slight frame shook with agitation and her hands were cold and moist as she grasped those of her son.

"Listen, William," she said; "I will tell you a painful tale. You may have gathered something of it in your boyhood, but not its details. *Will* you listen? Or are you going to despise even my words?"

"My dear mother! You know I will listen: in all reverence. If you would but afford me the opportunity to be reverent in all things!"

"I was a happy girl at home. My mother died—and then I owed my father a double duty. I was but a child, barely eighteen, when a young man, handsome, William, as you are now, was introduced to us. He was extravagant, random: but he loved me; and that was all I cared for. Our attachment became known to my father. He deemed this gentleman no eligible match for me: he doubted his ability, in many ways, to render me happy; and he put a stop to our

meetings. He forbade me to think more of him : he said if I did, in spite of his veto, pursue the acquaintance, that he would discard me from his house for ever. On the other side, the friends were equally averse to it ; and *his* parents bade him, though in all kindness, shrink from the fruits of disobedience. His father, a clergyman, implored of him not to brave it : he told him that deliberate disobedience to a parent was surely visited on a child's head. Happy for us both had we attended to their counsel, but youth, in its ardour, sees not things as they are : in after years, when soberness, experience, judgment have come to them, they look back and marvel at their blindness. We, he and I—oh, William ! that I should have such an avowal to make to you !—set our parents' interdiction at naught, and I ran away from my home to become his wife. That man was Thomas Elliot, your father."

She was excessively excited. Her son would have begged of her not so to disturb herself, but she waved away his interruption.

"We gloried in having deceived them. Not so much for the deceit, in itself—we had not quite descended to that—as that we had obtained our own will. But, William, how did it work ? How does such sin always work ?"

She paused, almost as if she waited for an answer. He did not speak.

"Look abroad in society, and watch the results : scan narrowly all those who have thus rebelliously entered on their own career. Sooner or later, more or less bitterly, retribution comes home to them. It may rarely be attributed to its right cause, even by themselves ; and many there are who would laugh at what I am now saying. None have had the cause that I have to note these things ; and it is from long experience, from repeated and repeated instances I have witnessed of the confirmation of my opinion, that my firm conviction has been formed. Some are visited through poverty ; some in their children ; some in themselves, in their unhappy life. We, William, have had a taste of all. In the early years of our union it was one struggle to live : perhaps you remember, yet, our pinchings and contrivances. My children died off, save you, one after the other ; and she, Clara, who remained to us"—Lady Elliot sank her voice to a whisper—"were better off had she followed them. I and he whom I chose have had no mutual happiness, for we found that we were as unsuited to each other as man and wife can be. My father never forgave me ; so, for his remaining years, and they were many, or seemed so, I was an alien from him. Thus have I dragged through life, trouble upon trouble pursuing me and the consciousness of my sin ever haunting me. William, before you talk of marrying Mary Goring, you should know what it is to brave and live under a parent's curse."

William Elliot did not reply, but his face wore a look of keen anxiety.

"At morning, at the sun's rising ; at evening, when it sets ; in the

nervousness of the dark night ; in the glare of mid-day, was my disobedience present to me ; heavily, heavily it pressed upon me. I would have forfeited all I possessed in life, even my remaining years, to have redeemed it : and, William, I prayed to God that He would in mercy keep *my* children from committing the like sin."

Lady Elliot paused for breath ; and her face, a sufficiently young face still in years, but not in sorrow, was blanched and her eyes were strained on her son.

"I prayed it as the greatest mercy that could then be accorded me. I have never ceased praying for it. William, will you, my ever-loving and dutiful boy, be the one to set that prayer at naught ?"

No answer. His lips were white as her own.

"You were my first-born, my first and dearest ; in you rests all the hope left to me : what other comfort have I in life ? I have said to myself, now and then, 'The closing years of my existence shall be brighter than the earlier ones, for my darling son shall be my stay and solace !' Oh, William, William ! give me your promise now ! I kneel to beg it. Say that you will never marry without our consent."

The lines of his pale face were working ; it seemed that he would speak, but could not. Lady Elliot had shrunk down at his feet and would not rise.

"If you bring upon yourself this same wretched fate which has been our bane, I shall never know another moment's peace. I shall repine that you did not die in infancy ; I shall wish, more than I have ever done, that I may die and be at rest from the trouble and care of this weary world. William, it is your mother who pleads to you. Promise that you will never marry in disobedience."

How could he resist such pleading—he, with duty and affection implanted in his heart by nature and hitherto fondly cherished ? It was not possible. "Mother, I promise it," he uttered, "as long as you and my father shall live. After that ——"

"After that ? Nay, I will not extort a further promise. You will then be your own master. But until that time—you pass your word, William ?"

"I do. You have it."

"Thank God. . Now I am at rest."

"Which is equivalent to undertaking never to marry at all," murmured the unhappy young man as he rose and quitted the room. "Oh, Mary ! how shall I part with you ?"

Hester was still standing at her drawing-room window after witnessing the departure of Sir Thomas Elliot, when she saw Lady Elliot's carriage drive to the gate and Miss Graves alight from it.

"I say," she cried, in her familiar way, as she entered, "what in the world is up ? Do you know what I am sent here for ?"

"Not exactly," replied Hester, though a dim suspicion floated through her mind.

"To take away Clara."

"To remove her entirely?"

"Yes; as far as I understand it. I was in the store-room, having a dispute with the cook about some pickles—for Lady Elliot looks to me to see to things; and if all the pickles and preserves in the house fermented and turned to froth and uselessness, she would never interfere herself to order it stopped—when one of the servants came in and said I was wanted in her ladyship's room. So up I went. 'Oblige me,' she said, 'by going to Halliwell House and bringing home Clara. The carriage is getting ready. Give my compliments to the Miss Halliwells and say they will have the kindness to forward me the account by post and send up her boxes by the carrier.' Those were her very words."

Hester made no remark.

"I never was so thunderstruck," continued Miss Graves. "'To fetch her home and her boxes!' I said. 'For good?'"

"'Yes,' answered Lady Elliot.

"'Have the Miss Halliwells offended your ladyship?' I asked. 'Have you discovered any cause of complaint against them?'"

"'Not against the Miss Halliwells,' she replied, in her stiff way. Unsociable she is at all times, but she was so much so this morning I did not dare to say another word. So all I could do was to put on my bonnet and obey orders: but I have been wondering the whole of the way down; and I met Sir Thomas in his brougham a little higher up. Had he been here?"

"He has not long left," replied Hester.

"Well now, do, Miss Halliwell, tell me what's amiss. Is it anything wrong between William and your niece? Have they quarrelled?"

"They are not likely persons to quarrel," rejoined Hester. "No. But Sir Thomas wishes to break off the marriage."

"Goodness me!" uttered Miss Graves. "And shall you allow him?"

"How can I help it?"

"Then of course you'll bring an action against them for Breach of Promise and all that."

"Breach of Promise!" echoed Hester, with a sickly smile. "Do not talk so, Miss Graves."

"Well, I should. What is their plea?"

"You must excuse my entering upon that. It is not," she hastily added, "anything personally connected with Mary. It relates to family matters; that much I will say."

"Does the objection come from Mr. William?"

"I think not. I am not sure."

"Well, it is incomprehensible," ejaculated Miss Graves. "I am sorry for Mary. It is a shabby trick to serve her."

Hester winced. "Shall I go and see that Clara is made ready?" she said.

"She must be made ready. Lady Elliot will not be pleased if I keep her horses waiting too long. By the way," added Miss Graves, "a thought has struck me, and it never did till this moment. Last night, after I went up to bed, I went down again for a book I thought I had left in the drawing-room. It was not there and I went to the dining-room. I had my hand on the door, when I heard the voices of Sir Thomas and Mr. William; very fast indeed they were talking; and I wondered, for Sir Thomas rarely talks much either with his wife or son. I suppose it had something to do with this business."

Hester supposed so likewise. She withdrew; and soon Miss Graves left the house with Clara Elliot. Nothing was said to the child but that she was going home for the day. Neither did Hester say anything in the house: the burden of her thoughts still was, how should she break the tidings to Mary Goring. She did not go again into the school-room, at which Lucy was surprised; but she felt unequal to it. And the evening came and still she had said nothing.

But the evening brought William Elliot. Hester knew his knock and ran out of the drawing-room, where they were seated at tea; and called to the servants to show him into the dining-room, not to let him come up; and then she went down herself.

"Oh, William!" she exclaimed, unable to restrain her tears, "what is to be done?"

He took her hands, kind as ever, but his own were unsteady and his face wore an unnatural paleness.

"What does Mary say? How does she bear it?" were his first words.

"I have not dared to tell her. I did not know how."

"That is well. She had better hear it from me."

"From you! Oh, no. She ought not to see you."

"Believe me, yes," he firmly rejoined. "None can soothe it to her, in the telling, as I can."

"It is the first shock that will be the worst, and I dread it for her."

He turned from Hester, put his arm on the window-frame and leaned his forehead upon it. She did not like to witness his emotion; his whole attitude bespoke despair.

"Let me see her," he resumed.

Hester reflected and believed it might be best. For what was she, what were all to her, in comparison with William Elliot? "One promise," she said. "You are not going to talk to Mary of a continued engagement, or—a—private marriage? Excuse me, but I have heard of such things being done."

"No; I give you my honour. I have already given it to my mother. This evening is to close my intercourse with Mary; and the interview I ask for is that we may bid each other farewell. I have no alternative. None. My mother——" he paused, and a sort of

shudder seemed to come over him—"my mother pointed out—that is—I would say she exacted a promise from me that I would never marry clandestinely ; without her full consent. And I gave it."

"Quite right," said Hester. "You could not have done otherwise."

"And now that they have taken this prejudice against Mary's family, to ask for consent would be fruitless. So there is no hope and I cannot help myself. But they had better——" he lowered his voice to a whisper—"have destroyed us both, as her mother was destroyed. It would have been more merciful."

Hester went upstairs to the drawing-room and beckoned Mary out.

"Oh, aunt!" she said, "what is all this ? Is anything the matter?"

"Yes, dear child, there is," answered Hester through her tears as she fondly stroked down her hair. "I have known it all day, and I could not tell you. William Elliot will ; he is in the dining-room. Now do not agitate yourself."

"But what is it ? Are we ——" she trembled excessively—"is he ——"

"Go to him, my darling. It is very cruel, but he will soothe it to you better than I can." So Mary went into the room and Mr. Elliot moved forward and closed the door behind her, while Hester paced the hall outside like a troubled ghost.

William Elliot drew Mary across the room in silence and folded her head down on to his breast and held it there.

"What is the matter ?" she asked, scarcely above her breath, while she shook visibly. "My aunt said she did not know how to tell me."

"Neither do I, Mary. Yet, told it must be. Can you bear it—whatever it may be ?"

"I will try to. I have borne some cruel things in my life."

"We are to be separated."

She had thought nothing less from the moment she saw her aunt's agitation. She did not speak ; only raised one hand and laid it on her chest. William Elliot held the other.

"After to-night we are to be as strangers," he added. "And this is to be our last meeting on earth."

"By your own wish ?" she murmured.

"Mary !"

The tone of reproof, though it was mixed with tenderness, caused her tears to come.

"Then who is doing it ?"

"My father and mother."

"For what reason ?"

William Elliot hesitated. "It is a prejudice they have taken against the memory of your father ; your aunt can explain it. I will not, for I do not share in it."

"And this interview is to be our last !" she moaned.

"Mary, I could have married you still, for I am my own master

and my property is sufficient to live quietly upon until I get my profession into play. But it would have been a marriage of defiance; and you, perhaps, would not enter into such."

She shook her head. "No—no."

"And so have brought down anger from on High upon us for disobedience."

She shivered, and held up her hand for him to desist.

"Such a marriage as was my father and mother's," he continued in a whisper. "She told me so to-day. She says that a curse clung to them for years; always has clung to them; and she implored me not to bring the like upon myself. She knelt to me—Mary, do you hear?—my mother knelt to me!"

"Yes, I hear all. Poor Lady Elliot!"

"Could I refuse to promise obedience not to enter into a rebellious marriage? And my mother also worked upon my duty and affection. Though I know not, in justice to you, whether I ought to have promised."

"There was no other course," she sadly answered. "I would not have married you, William, in opposition to your parents."

"Ah, Mary! they think they have done a fine thing in separating us; they say they have acted for my welfare and happiness. That people can so delude themselves! It will cost us dear."

Her tears broke into sobs and he clasped her closer to him, their hearts beating one against the other. Let us leave them to themselves: these sort of partings are too sacred to be touched upon.

It was quite dusk when he came out to leave and Hester was walking about still. The hall lamp was lighted and she saw the traces of emotion on both faces. Yes, on both; and you need not despise William Elliot for that. We do not, many of us, throughout our lives, go through such a trying interview as that had been to him.

"God bless you, dear Miss Halliwell," he said, "and thank you for the many courtesies, the kindness you have shown me. Thank you, also, for your care of Clara: I do not know whether anyone else has thought to do it. I hear she is removed."

"Yes. To-day."

He wrung Hester's hand and turned again to Mary. "And God bless *you*," he added, in a whisper: "remember, Mary, what I have said. Though they have succeeded in separating us, though your path must lie one way and mine another and we may not meet again, you will ever be first in the heart of William Elliot."

He departed; Mary disappeared; and Hester sat down in the dark room they had left. "The sins of the fathers shall be visited on the children!" she murmured to herself. "Was it ever exemplified in any case more plainly than in this? When Matthew Goring made love to his daughter's governess, or encouraged her to make it to him—whichever it might be—outraging his wife, outraging his children, outraging me (I, who pointed out his wicked folly to him

and got ridicule from him for my pains), did he imagine that very folly would be the means hereafter of destroying his dearest child's happiness and prospects in life? No. Yet it has proved so. Oh, men! you who have wives and children, how careful should you be to tread in the right path!"

Careful indeed! and Hester Halliwell is right. A little dereliction from it may seem but a light matter, not worth a thought, only worth the amusement of the moment *and scarcely that*: it seemed but so to Dr. Goring. Yet for him what did it bring forth? His wife's destruction; his disgraceful second marriage; his own early death; the breaking-up of his children's home and the driving them out, orphans, into the world. And now, as it seemed, the fatality was pursuing even them! Carelessly enough does man commit sin, but when on the point of wilfully falling into it, he would do well to pause and remember that the promises of God are never broken, and that one of those promises is "I WILL VISIT THE SINS OF THE FATHERS UPON THE CHILDREN."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

RIGHT AT LAST.

CHRISTMAS passed over, January passed over; and one morning in the first week in February it happened that Hester had business in town. Something arose, connected with the property of the Gorings, which rendered it necessary for her to seek an interview with the agent of Lawyer Stone, of Middlebury, who had made Dr. Goring's will. The agent was a Mr. Eeckington, living in the Temple; and Hester started by the omnibus the first thing after breakfast. She got into the Temple, that is, into its mazes and windings, and went about looking for Mr. Eeckington's chambers, for she had never been there but once and did not readily remember the spot. But she reached it at last: she knew it by a neighbouring pump, whose handle was padlocked; and mounted the stairs, a great height, for he lived on the top story. She stood a minute or two to recover breath—not being able to run up seventy or eighty steps as blithely as she once could—and then turned the handle and knocked briskly at the black door. And after Hester had done that, lo! and behold! there stood some great white letters staring her in the face: "Sergeant Pyne."

Sergeant Pyne was not Mr. Eeckington, that was certain; but before Hester had time to deliberate, a boy flung the door open. She asked for Mr. Eeckington.

"In there," said the boy, opening an inside door; and Hester entered the office. She knew the room again directly, though its furniture was different; and she saw the tops of the pleasant green trees outside. A gentleman in a grey coat, with a pen behind his ear, rose from a desk and came forward.

"Sir," said Hester, "I am in search of Mr. Eckckington."

"Mr. Eckckington! Oh, the former occupant here. He has removed, ma'am, to chambers in Lincoln's Inn."

The gentleman gave the address; indeed, took the trouble to write it on a card and directed her the best way to go there. Hester thanked him for his civility, which she thought extremely condescending for a sergeant: though it occurred to her afterwards that he might be only the sergeant's clerk. Hester went away, blaming Lawyer Stone's negligence in not having informed her of the removal of his agent, but had only gained the pump when her steps came to a halt, for it flashed across her mind that the address in Lincoln's Inn just written down for her was that of Mr. William Elliot.

She toiled up the stairs again, when Sergeant Pyne (or his clerk) assured her the address was Mr. Eckckington's: he knew nothing of Mr. William Elliot.

Hester got into Lincoln's Inn, nearly losing herself; and to her dismay found that Mr. Eckckington was out. "Gone before the Master of the Rolls," the clerk said; "and might not be in till late." So all Hester could do was to go back home again and write to appoint an interview. She had proceeded but a few steps when she came in view of a young gentleman sailing towards her, in a grey wig and black gown, which flew out with the wind on all sides as he walked. It cannot be said but that Hester looked on the wearers of these gowns with considerable awe (possibly because she had never seen much of them), and as there appeared scarcely space on the pavement for her and the gown to pass each other, Hester turned off it to give place. Imagine her astonishment when the gentleman stopped and held out his hand. She drew back, believing he mistook her for someone else and half dropped a curtsy in her humility.

Positively it was Lawyer Stone's son, Bob! And though Hester had nursed him many a time when he was a child, coaxed him, kissed him and once (if it may now be confessed) whipped him, she hardly presumed to let her hand meet his, in his new dignity.

"You were going to pass me?" he said.

"How was I to know you in that fine plumage?" asked Hester. "I thought it might be nothing less than a judge coming along, and stood aside to give him room. So you are called!"

"Oh, thank goodness, yes; the worry's over. I'm precious glad of it."

"I went to the Temple to find Mr. Eckckington this morning, and heard he had moved here," observed Hester. "Your father ought to have informed me."

"Eckckington is in Elliot's old chambers: took them off his hands," replied Mr. Stone. "Elliot gave up the law and is going to travel. He was red-hot for the Crimea, but now the war is over he would be a day too late for the fair there, so he is off somewhere else. He is up to his ears in preparation for his departure, for he

purposes being abroad for years, if not for the term of his natural life—as the Bench says to our transports. Hope it may be my luck to say it, sometime.”

“What is the cause of Mr. Elliot’s going?”

“He is in tantrums with his governor. The old folks put a stopper on his marriage, with—I declare, Miss Halliwell, I beg your pardon! I forgot, for the moment, how nearly you were connected with the affair. I suppose you know more than I can tell you.”

“Indeed, I know very little, beyond the fact that he and my niece are separated, Robert.” (Hester brought the name “Robert” out with difficulty: it seemed too familiar so to address a personage in a wig and gown. Though, indeed, she used to call him nothing but “Bob.”)

“They first, Sir Thomas and the old lady,” continued he, in irreverent barrister fashion, “retracted their consent to the marriage, and then wormed an undertaking out of Elliot not to marry without. Which was like what the school-children say to their companions, when they have a cake from home and want to gormandise it all to their own cheek: ‘Them as ask shan’t have any; and them as don’t, don’t want.’”

The barrister laughed and so did Hester. In spite of his fine gown, he was Bob Stone still. It set her more at ease.

“So Elliot gave his word, and of course will stick to it,” he resumed; “but afterwards, when he came to reflect upon the thing in cool blood, he felt that he had been harshly dealt by—tricked, in short, into promising away what we may call the subject’s right of liberty. Altogether, he was disgusted with everything, threw up his profession, and means to throw up Old England. Good-morning, Miss Halliwell. I’ll tell the governor of his negligence when I write to Middlebury.”

Now it may sound (Hester remarked so afterwards) like a made-up incident, such as those we read of in a romance, to state that soon after parting with Mr. Stone, she met William Elliot. But it was so. She was standing in the great thoroughfare, looking out for the right omnibus, when he came tearing along, pushing straight forward and looking at no one, in as much bustle as if he had all the business of the city on his shoulders. Hester caught his arm to stop him. He looked ill and careworn: her heart ached to see him.

“What is this I hear, William, about you quitting England?”

“Why remain in it?” was his answer. “What have I left to look forward to?”

“Your profession,” faltered Hester.

“I have lost interest in it. Men strive to get on, not only to attain eminence, but to win a home. They think of a wife; of children; of domestic happiness. They may gain the very highest honours of the land, but, without ties of the home and heart, such

distinctions are cold and valueless. So I abandon a country where hope is denied me."

"This must be as a death-blow to your father and mother," exclaimed Hester.

"A blow I believe it is. I wish Fate had been kinder to all of us."

"When do you go?"

"I leave London to-morrow night for Southampton. The steamer for Malta starts the following day. I visit the East first."

"To remain abroad—how long?"

"Probably for ever. Certainly for years."

"Oh, William!" exclaimed Hester, "if I could only persuade you to relinquish your purpose!"

He smiled—a sickly smile. "As others have sought to persuade me—ineffectually. How is it at home? Well?"

"Not very well," replied Hester, knowing to whom he alluded. "Men can wear out regrets with bustle and travel, as you are about to do; but women, who are condemned to inactivity, retain remembrance more keenly."

"God be with you, dear Miss Halliwell," he said, preparing to move on; "and take my dearest love and blessing to *her*. I dare say I shall never see either of you again."

He wrung her hand, in his emotion, till she thought he would have wrung it off; and a ring, which she happened to have on, cut right into her finger. But Hester was too much troubled to care for the pain. It seemed to her that Sir Thomas Elliot and his wife had much to answer for.

That same night Hester walked about her bed-room until the small hours of the morning. She was debating a question with herself. What *right*, human or divine, had Sir Thomas and Lady Elliot, in their obstinate pride and prejudice, to condemn two of their fellow-creatures to despair, even though one was the son to whom they had given birth? Did it not lie in her duty to point out to them their sin—to make an effort to awaken their own minds to it? Firmer and firmer became Hester's conviction that it was so; and when her mind was at length made up, a feeling came over her that neither her own strength nor her own spirit was urging her to it.

There was no time to let the grass grow under her feet, and the next afternoon found Hester at Sir Thomas Elliot's. Lady Elliot was pitifully subdued by sorrow, and would have given her own life to keep her son in England. Hester entered upon the matter, giving her opinion unshrinkingly, but Lady Elliot was blind to all sides of the case save her own, and spoke up, passionately complaining.

"No joy have I had in life; no peace; nothing but despair: before one affliction yielded to time another arose. I had nothing left but him; nothing else to comfort me on the wide earth; and now he is going away for ever, for he is resolved not to return to England.

To-night he comes to take his leave and I shall see him for the last time."

"And thankful I am, ma'am, that I am not in your shoes," said Hester. "If that young man decamps into unknown regions, among infidels and Hottentots and rushes into sin and everything that's bad, to drown his unhappiness, you and his father must answer for it to his Maker, for you alone will have driven him to it."

"Oh, of course, of course," she answered, in tones of the bitterest sarcasm; "it has been my fault through life; everything; no one's but mine. I wish it were ended!"

"I think a great deal has been your fault, Lady Elliot," rejoined Hester. "Various afflictions have come to you, *as they come to all*, and yours have not been worse than many others are. But have you striven to avert them, to turn them away? Have you been patiently submissive under them and, accepting them as chastisements sent by God, resigned yourself fully to His good will? Have you endeavoured to make sunshine out of the blessings they have been mixed with?"

"What blessings?" asked Lady Elliot. "I know of none."

Hester gazed at her in surprise. The fact was, Lady Elliot had so accustomed herself to living a life of repining, that her mind was perverted and she could see no good in anything.

"Does your ease count for nothing, your freedom from the cares of the world, your luxurious home?" cried Hester, as she directed her eyes round the room. "Do you forget the ample means you possess of gratifying every imaginable wish and the golden opportunities afforded you of bestowing a tithe of your superfluous wealth upon those steeped in poverty? Above all, ma'am, do you reflect how rich you are in your son? What good gifts are there, whether of person or of mind, that have not been dealt out to him with an unsparing hand? No blessings, Lady Elliot!"

"I *was* blest in him," she answered; "I was, I was. And I shall be so no more."

"Oh, Lady Elliot, how blest you might still be!" uttered Hester. "Believe me, God's mercies are given to you *abundantly*. If you could but see them! If you would but consent to tear the scales from your mind and convert its gloom into sunshine! Did it ever occur to you to ask what children are bestowed on us for?"

"For our punishment," perversely answered Lady Elliot. "Mine have been."

"They were bestowed on us that we might promote their happiness here and so lead them to Heaven through their gratitude, their thankfulness of heart," said Hester. "Not that we might selfishly crush their innocent hopes and thwart their wishes, at our own caprice or pleasure, driving them into rebellion, and so on to deceit, recklessness and evil."

"Then, when my father opposed me in my wish to marry," Lady

Elliot resumed, in almost a sullen tone, "you would say he ought to have consented to it? Is that your argument? It is a new one."

"No, I hope such an argument is not mine. Your father was right. The objection was to Thomas Elliot: and it was not a frivolous chimera, as in your son's case. Mr. Freer thought he was not calculated to make you happy; and his worldly circumstances were against any marriage, for he possessed nothing. The error, there, lay with you, Lady Elliot. Your duty was to bow to your father's decision and submissively wait, hoping that time would subdue the objections. You and Thomas Elliot were both young enough."

"You seem to be pretty well acquainted with my family affairs, Miss Halliwell!"

"I am not a total stranger to them. I have been for some years intimate with the Thornycrofts of Coastdown, who are relatives of the Elliot family; and I was myself once on the point of marriage with your husband's cousin, the Reverend George Archer: but I think you have heard this before. I have had my sorrows in life, Lady Elliot, as fully as most people: sorrows of the heart, of the inward life; as also of the outer one. But I have striven, by patient resignation, to make the best of them; and they are sorrows to me no more. Yours will pass away, if you so choose; and the world will become pleasant to you—always remembering to walk in it as your probation to a better. Try it, Lady Elliot."

"Try what?"

"To make your own happiness; to make your husband's, *which you have never yet heartily striven to do*; to make your son's. You will live to thank me for having suggested it."

Lady Elliot burst into tears and laid her head on the sofa cushion. And at that moment Sir Thomas Elliot appeared at the door and stood quietly rooted to it, in surprise. Lady Elliot, from her position, could not see him and Hester pretended not to. She thought it well that he should hear a bit of her mind, as well as his wife.

"William is going forth into exile," she resumed to Lady Elliot, "a lonely, miserable man: he voluntarily separates himself from you. Would he do this if you were true to him, a loving mother? And you, what will remain to you after his departure? Discontented repining, bitter self-reproach, a yearning for him whom you cannot then bring back. You say that a curse—though I assure you I shrink from repeating such a word—has followed you through life, follows you still. Break it, Lady Elliot."

Lady Elliot raised her head and looked at Hester.

"Keep William by you, a son to rejoice in and be proud of. Let him make his own happiness and help him in it: take an interest in his plans, in his profession, and be to him a tender friend. Diffuse a pleasant spirit in your home: make the best of poor Clara and

win back the affections of your husband, as you strove to win them in your girlhood : and, above all, cherish in your heart a spirit of thankfulness to ONE, who has put all these blessings in your way, a repentant, submissive, hopeful spirit—and none were ever submissive to Him in vain. Where would the curse be then? Gone, Lady Elliot."

"If I could think—if I could think it has been, in a measure, my own fault, in thus encouraging a murmuring spirit of rebellion!" she wailed, clasping her hands in intense anguish. "Oh! if I *could* change this black despair for peace! If I could indeed retain William at my side! If I could find happiness in what has been a thankless home!"

"I'll help you," cried Sir Thomas, coming forward. "If you will only manage to keep William in his own country and give us a bit of cheerfulness at home, instead of gloom, I will do my part towards it." He looked, as he spoke, more like the merry Tom Elliot of her girlhood than he had done for years. Hope leaped up into Hester's heart: she thought she saw her way becoming clear and she explained the purport of her visit to Sir Thomas.

"In point of family, Mary Goring's is not inferior to yours: and you and I, Sir Thomas, only narrowly escaped being cousins in early life."

"Through George Archer, the booby!" uttered Sir Thomas. "You would have saved him, Miss Halliwell."

"And—you will pardon me for stating it, Sir Thomas—when I and George Archer were once jestingly comparing notes as to our relative importance, my family, in point of descent and connections, was found to be superior to his and yours. Believe me, though you have risen in the world, Mary Goring's descent is equal to William Elliot's."

"But it was not Miss Goring's family we objected to," returned the knight.

"Oh, yes, it was, in reality," said Hester. "Again I say, excuse my speaking freely, Sir Thomas; the subject justifies it. You and Lady Elliot were mortified because William did not choose a wife from the higher ranks of life. You stated to me, Sir Thomas, that, personally, you estimated Miss Goring highly."

"I do," he answered.

"And you cannot, you, a sensible man, believe that Dr. Goring was guilty. It is impossible that you can do so, if you have dispassionately examined into the details of the affair. Imprudent he was; infatuated; nothing more—and he paid the penalty. Do you think, if he had indeed committed a crime so awful and upon my own sister, that I would come here to excuse him, to protest there was no stain on his character? No, Sir Thomas. I have my own high and responsible duties in life to perform; and I would not say or do a thing that my conscience disapproves. When I assert Matthew

Goring's innocence, I assert what I believe to be as true as that there is a heaven above us."

He made no reply.

"Think not I come here as a petitioner to urge my niece's claims, or to protest against her wrongs. Though the wrong, allow me to say, Lady Elliot, was forced upon her by your side, not sought on mine, for it was you who deliberately suffered the intimacy between her and William to grow up."

Sir Thomas nodded his head approvingly. No danger that he would gainsay that.

"No," resumed Hester, "I came here with no selfish motives, but because it was essential that someone should point out to you both how grievously you were erring; and I believed the task was allotted to me. To drive William away from his country and destroy his prospects in life is a heavy sin to lay to your door. How will you atone for it?"

Sir Thomas Elliot began pacing the room with uneasy strides. Presently he spoke, but in a reluctant tone.

"Since I first heard of the affair at Middlebury, I have learnt more of its particulars. And I confess I now think it probable that Dr. Goring was—so far as regarded his wife's death—an innocent man."

"Then act upon it, Sir Thomas," cried Hester, briskly. "Stop your son's voyage, now, at the eleventh hour; and restore things to their former footing."

"Louisa, what do you say?" he asked of his wife. "I told you, once before, that in this affair I would abide by your decision."

"I do not know what to say," sobbed Lady Elliot. "If I could think——"

"Think that you are going to be happier than you have been for many years," interrupted Hester. "Think that your dear son, whom you grieve as lost to you, will remain at home to comfort you with his love: think of the merry romps you will have with his children: and when the time arrives that you are laid on your dying bed, Lady Elliot, think that he will be at its side to bless you, instead of beyond your reach, hundreds of miles, over the salt sea."

She rose from the sofa, and the tears were streaming down her cheeks as she held out her hand to Hester. "Miss Halliwell, you have conquered. Thomas," she added, turning to her husband, "we may have done wrong to William. Let us repair it."

"With all my heart," he replied. "Anything is preferable to the gloom which has latterly overhung the house. Miss Halliwell, we have to thank you for this. But if we are really to turn over a new leaf and look out for—what was it?—sunbeams, you must come often and repeat your lessons; otherwise, we may forget the way and lapse back again."

"Oh, yes, I will be sure to come. But I do not think you will do

that now. And I assure you, Sir Thomas Elliot, I never felt so proud in my life. To think that my poor, homely pleading has effected this great purpose! But it was not mine. There was *ONE*, greater than we are, who put it in my heart to come and has helped me through with it."

They pressed Hester to stay to—she did not hear whether it was tea or dinner. The latter, she thought; but if so, it must have been kept waiting a considerable time, for it was long past seven o'clock. Not she. She was too anxious to reach home and impart the joyful news to Mary Goring.

Sir Thomas sat down by his wife as Hester left the room. "I will do my part towards it all, Loo," he whispered: "on the old faith of Tom Elliot. Here's my hand upon it."

She smiled pleasantly, and put her hand into his. "Oh, Thomas," she said, "we have both been wrong, all these years: I see it all: and I more wrong than you. Let us forget and forgive and try to make life pleasant to each other."

His smile echoed hers, and he leaned forward and kissed her. The first happy smile, the first voluntary kiss, they had exchanged for years.

"I think it seems as if the curse were gone," she murmured, the rich glow of hope lighting her cheek.

"I never believed there was one," smiled Sir Thomas, "except in your imagination. What may have seemed like it we brought daily upon ourselves."

"By not making the best of things," she eagerly answered. "Oh, yes: it was so."

As Hester was passing the dining-room door, Clara Elliot saw her, and, with a scream of delight, ran out, jumping around her like a little dog. Poor child! her mind was no stronger. But of that there was no hope. Miss Graves looked out also, very much astonished to see who was the visitor. Hester did not explain.

"Why do I never go to your house?" Clara exclaimed. "It is such a long while! Why don't you send Mary to see me?"

"Mary has been very ill, my dear," answered Hester. "She cannot go out now."

"Mary ill! Let me come and see her to-morrow."

"Yes, dear child, you shall," interrupted Lady Elliot, advancing. "And I will go with you. Oh, Miss Halliwell!" she whispered, shaking Hester once more by the hand, "I think you are right. You don't know what a load is taken off my heart."

As Hester left the street door, who should be stepping out of a cab but William Elliot. She waited while he paid the cabman and then took him by surprise.

"I have just left your father and mother."

"Indeed!" he said, looking almost incredulous. "This is my farewell evening with them, Miss Halliwell. I go down by the night train."

"So you persist in leaving England?"

"I sail to-morrow."

"Now which would you rather do, Mr. William?" cried she. "Go abroad in that horrid steamer—no disparagement to it in particular, but all steamers are horrid—from which you will wish yourself out again before you have been a couple of hours at sea, or stop at home and marry Mary Goring?"

"Oh," he evasively answered, while the red colour flashed into his face, "I am so overwhelmed with preparations for the start that I can think of nothing else just now."

"But just ask yourself the question: *and answer it as you will.*"

There was something in Hester's tone which struck upon him, even more forcibly than the words. He grasped her by the shoulder—what *did* she mean?

"Go in, dear Mr. William," whispered Hester. "I have paved the way for you with Sir Thomas and Lady Elliot. I think if you do prefer Mary to the steamer, you may have her."

Hester never knew whether she reached home on her head or her heels. A dilatory omnibus, given to stopping, took her, but she herself was not clear upon the point. Lucy exclaimed at her long absence and inquired if she had taken tea.

"No. I should like a cup."

She took a light and went upstairs to the best bed-room, which had been given up to Mary for the illness which had followed the breaking of her engagement. She had fallen into a doze as she lay on the sofa. Quietly taking off her own cloak and bonnet, Hester sat down by her. Nothing of Mary could be seen but her face, for she had wrapped a shawl round her and someone had thrown a covering over her feet. Her brow was contracted, as with pain, and her mouth stood slightly open—often the case in illness—but the young face, in spite of its whiteness, was lovely still. "We will soon have that fair brow smooth again, my child," thought Hester, as she gently stirred the fire into a blaze.

Presently Hester heard a noise as of talking, downstairs. It mounted to the drawing-room adjoining; and then Lucy appeared, carrying the cup of tea. But Hester rose from her seat in amazement, for stealing in after her was William Elliot. "The idea of his coming down to night," thought Hester. "And how quickly he must have followed upon me!"

"I could not help it," Lucy whispered to her, in a tone of apology. "He would see Mary, and when I urged that she was in her bedroom, he said what did that matter? Oh, Hester! he says she is to be his wife, after all!"

The bustle woke Mary, and the hectic flushed into her cheek when consciousness fully returned to her. She would have risen up, but William Elliot prevented it. He was shocked to terror at the change he saw in her and, as he told Hester afterwards, believed

her to be dying. He leaned over her with his gentle tenderness and his hot tears fell on her face.

"Oh, Mary!" he whispered, as he laid his cheek to hers: "I see how ill you have been, but you must bear up for my sake. Our separation is over, my darling: my mother will be here to-morrow to tell you so. Very soon, very soon, you will be all mine."

"But what about the steamer, William?" asked Hester in the gladness of her heart, but making believe to be very serious.

"The steamer must go without me."

"But your preparations, your outfit and your great strong boxes? Are they to be wasted?"

"I will give them to you if you like, Aunt Hester," quoth he. "I am in a generous mood."

"And go back to the law again?" she questioned.

"Of course. Hoping, in time, to lord it over you all on the woolsack. Who knows but I may?"

Hester snatched a moment to drink her tea. Mary, always thirsty now, glanced at it with eager eyes. Then William Elliot pleaded for some; to put him in mind of old times, he said, and convince him he was not dreaming. Next, Lucy thought she should like a cup, instead of supper. So they had the round table drawn before Mary's sofa and actually, as Hester expressed it, held a tea-party in the bed-room. She said she hoped no one would reproach her with its being improper. When Frances Goring came in from the school-room to say good-night, there they were seated at it, with a great plate of buttered toast before them; and Frances looked as if she never meant to recover her astonishment. She stood just inside the room, staring at William Elliot.

"Ah, Frances! how do you do?" he said, holding out his hand.

But Miss Frances, like the schoolgirl she was, stood immovable. "What have you come again for, Mr. Elliot?" she brought out.

"I? To have another of your aunt's housekeeping lessons," he merrily answered. "Touching the apple-tarts and legs of mutton, you know. She must give it to me, especially to-night. Mary is too ill."

"And are you coming again—other nights?"

"I hope so."

"Oh!" cried Frances, clasping her hands, "I am so glad! It seems like those famous evenings back again. If you could only make Mary well, as she was then!"

"I'll try," said William Elliot.

Hester went downstairs with him when he was leaving. "You see how ill she looks," whispered Hester. "Do not set your heart too steadfastly upon her."

"Change of prospects will do much for her," was his reply, "and change of air may do the rest. She shall have that with me."

"With you, Mr. William!"

"Yes. And you know what that must imply," he returned, with a smile of very decided meaning. "So, if the former preparations are done away with, dear Miss Halliwell, you had best set about some more with morning light. We have suffered too much to risk another separation; and I promise you that, ill or well, Mary Goring shall soon be Mary Elliot."

Lady Elliot came the next day and burst into tears when she saw Mary: like her son, she was deeply shocked. Clara would not go away again, so Lady Elliot left her to remain a day or two.

However, as William Elliot had said, change of prospects seemed to do wonders for Mary. Her recovery was rapid, not all at once to robust health, but sufficiently so to remove their fears. The wedding was fixed for the last week in April. Hester was for deferring it till the Midsummer holidays, when the house would be free and Mary stronger, but Mr. Elliot banteringly inquired if she would not prefer to defer it till Midsummer two years. And the Reverend Alfred Halliwell took a long journey across the country to marry them, as he had once before taken a journey to marry her unfortunate mother. He was going to allow himself a fortnight's holiday; that is, from the Monday till the next Saturday week, a friend taking his duty for him on the intervening Sunday and Mr. Dewisson's curate taking it on the week-days. Previously to this, his son George had sailed again as third officer, in a far better ship and service than the last.

They had a jolly wedding: as Master Alfred Goring expressed it. Lady Elliot was in a dazzling dress of satin and gold, which caused every eye in the church to water and threw Mary's white silk quite into the shade. Frances Goring was bridesmaid, thereby acquiring an unlimited amount of vanity, which she has not lost yet.

Hester never could tell how she comported herself at the breakfast-table, except that it was very badly. She took the top of the table, having Sir Thomas Elliot on her right hand and Mr. Pepper, a grey-haired gentleman, in gold spectacles and heavy gold chain, on her left. The clergyman was at the foot of the table, having the bride and bridegroom on one side of him and Lady Elliot on the other. Sir Thomas made merry over Hester's nervous mistakes and kept everyone alive with laughter. He seemed quite to have returned to the free and open manners of his youth; and Hester felt certain that he *was* doing his part of the bargain, as he had promised Lady Elliot. It is probable they both felt, as they looked around, that Mary Goring's connections were not so very despicable, after all, or so far removed from their own position. Looking down upon the numerous guests was the portrait of Mary's ancestor, the Lady Hester Halliwell. Wonderfully, with years, had Hester grown like it. Strangers calling, often thought it was Hester's portrait and that she had dressed herself in the old style of George the Second to have it taken in. Lady Elliot looked happy too, really happy, as Hester had

never seen her look until lately. Miss Graves was in high feather and sat next to Master Alfred, whom she kept in order, at the request of Hester. She had not gone to church, having remained with Clara, for they had not ventured to take the latter. Poor Clara! she was dressed out as splendidly as her mother, laughed, by starts, all breakfast time and nearly had one of her eating fits, but William Elliot had her by his side and restrained her. Jessie Pepper and little Jane Goring were also at the table: as to the other pupils and the teachers, they had holiday and a handsome dinner; so everyone was pleased and the day passed off delightfully.

They left early in the afternoon, the bride and bridegroom, in one of Sir Thomas Elliot's carriages, for the London-bridge Station, intending to reach Dover that evening and France the following day; purposing to remain on the Continent all the summer and perhaps the autumn. "It will benefit Mary," William Elliot had said, "and we both deserve a holiday." Meanwhile, Lady Elliot and Hester had promised to occupy themselves with the furnishing and arranging of their new residence, Mr. Elliot especially charging Hester to see to the setting-up of the housekeeping department. Hester was the last to shake hands with him in the hall, whilst Sir Thomas was handing Mary to the carriage.

"You will take care of her, William?" whispered Hester, the tears falling from her eyes and she calling them "tiresome" for it. "She cannot be said to be well yet."

"You know there is no need to give me the injunction," William Elliot answered, whilst the ingenuous flush stole into his face, the sweet, earnest look to his truthful eye. "When I bring Mary home again, she will be so improved you will none of you recognise her." And Hester felt that his words were likely to be verified.

Late in the evening, when all had dispersed, the two sisters and their brother sat around the fire. They had not so sat, alone, for many, many years. "And," Mr. Halliwell said, remarking upon it, "we may never so sit again."

Hester told him the story of Lady Elliot, how she had been aroused from her grumbling and sinful discontent: that very day she had again fervently thanked Hester for awaking her to hope and to peace in life.

"She should have had half the trials to endure that have fallen to my lot," exclaimed the clergyman.

"Do you know what I have often thought of?" remarked Lucy; "often and often. That theory of Aunt Copp's—that because our father heedlessly risked his money and lost it, not because he was poor, but to increase his riches when he had already plenty, leaving us almost destitute, we, his children, should have to wrestle with hard fate through life. Do you remember her saying it, Alfred? do you, Hester?"

They nodded. "It has proved tolerably true with most of us," said Mr. Halliwell. "But God has been very good to us, for—thanks be unto Him!—our trials might have been so much worse; and lately they have been considerably lessened. Sorrows are the necessary evils of mortality, but we can well endure them when we look to that blessed land of rest which they are fitting us for. Many, whose outward lot is cast in brightness, make sorrow for themselves: look at what you say of Lady Elliot."

"Oh, yes," interrupted Hester; "indeed we have MUCH to be thankful for. Brighter days are come upon us all than we once hoped for; and I trust our hearts have been so purified that we may 'endure to the end.' But I wish I could arouse the whole world to a healthy state of mind, as I was humbly instrumental in arousing that of Lady Elliot."

I wish she could. For let every one of God's creatures be fully assured that they possess within themselves the power to make or mar, in a great measure, their own happiness here; *that upon the state of the mind and heart depends life's sunshine.*

THE END.



SONNET.

THOU deadly weariness of life, begone!
 Insidious foe of every noble thought,
 I know thee but too well. Ah! haunt me not
 With Heaven's rest. The battle is not won!
 The weary hireling's task is not half done!
 Spite heat of sun and chill night dews, the strife
 Between Desire and Will is yet as rife
 As e'en in ardent youth. When years have flown
 I, too, may take my wages, and sit by
 The path where others crowd in eager race
 For Life's sweet prizes. Oh! more sweet is death;
 More blessed sleep than waking, to the eye
 That sees and loves not. 'Tis God's tender grace
 That takes, e'en as it gives, our mortal breath!

JULIA KAVANAGH.

THE POWER OF GRATITUDE.

By ANNE BEALE.

"**H**E that expecteth nothing will not be disappointed." On this principle, let no man expect gratitude. A benefit is no benefit if a return has to be made: and gratitude is often a very painful return.

Still we sometimes get it when and where we least look for it; and what man holds back, the so-called inferior animals occasionally give. We know that the horse and dog are grateful, but then they are not inferior animals, but often superior to their master, or tyrant, man. What shall we say of gratitude in cats and birds? Having met with one or two instances of it, we venture to repeat them, though with a trembling fear that some sceptical people will declare that there is more greed than gratitude in them. However, we know of a grateful blackbird, and his gratitude was very sweetly expressed: also of a grateful cat, whose language was less dulcet.

To a house in a small country town was appended the smallest of gardens. The three walls that surrounded it were well covered with ivy, which had grown almost into trees at the corners. The border underneath the walls was filled with plants, the path round it neatly gravelled, the little grass-plot in the centre mown to the extinction of dandelions, and the beds therein a blaze of red geraniums, calceolarias and other brilliant flowers.

But it was so small that scarcely did the sparrows condescend to visit it. To be sure they had happier hunting grounds in a large, tree-filled and fruit-and-flower-stocked garden that surmounted it on one side, while on the other was a walled space uniform with itself. At the back was a stable-yard, unfrequented by songsters—at least, by feathered ones.

One autumn day there was a tremendous hail-storm. We looked forth in dismay on the flower-beds. They had lately been filled by the gardener of some generous friends in the neighbourhood, who sent us, periodically, a wheel-barrow of plants. The hail would assuredly destroy them. Down it came, slanting, apparently, from the hill-garden on the right. Suddenly it bore with it, and deposited violently on the greensward, something black.

"It must be a bird," we exclaimed, and ran out and picked it up.

It was a blackbird. We took it into the house. At first we thought it was dead, but it was only paralysed with terror, so we chafed and restored it. The storm suddenly abated, and we returned with it to the garden, carrying a handful of crumbs. We placed bird and crumbs on the grass, and were surprised to see it plume

itself and peck the crumbs. At last it flew off, up to the trees in the big garden on the hill.

The next day, sunshine had revived the flowers, and about the same time in the afternoon that had heralded in the hail, the blackbird reappeared, accompanied by another blackbird.

Whether they expected more hail they did not say, but the one which had found safety in the wee parterre had evidently communicated the fact to the other, probably her mate, and had led him into, not out of, Paradise. They were male and female, for the one was of the jet-black plumage acquired by the gentleman, the other of the brownish-black feather distinguishing the lady.

Every day did these new friends pay us a visit. As we had no fruit trees in our tiny preserve, they did us no harm; on the contrary, they proved excellent allies, clearing out slugs, worms and such insects as attacked the flowers.

We fed them through the winter, and if by chance they did not appear, were very unhappy, wondering what evil fate might have overtaken them. They evidently considered themselves "monarchs of all they surveyed," and when, in the frost and snow, smaller birds disputed their domain and food with them, held their own, though their nature is shy. They passed the night and twilight hours elsewhere, but rarely failed to visit us during the day.

One morning in early spring, hard upon the Feast of St. Valentine, we were suddenly regaled with a song so sweet, prolonged and inspiring, that we looked out of our bed-room window in amazement, for song-birds usually poured forth their melody in the region above and beyond, the dear robins excepted.

There were the blackbirds perched upon one of the tall ivy bushes in the corner of the wall. The male was piping that exultant song, while the female was examining the big ivy bush. This proved to be the first preparation for house-building.

From that time forth, business as well as music occupied the pair. They built their nest in the ivy, choosing the site with cunning care. It was pretty to watch them flying from highland to lowland, carrying bits of moss, small sticks or grass, for the outer wall of their domicile; and, subsequently mud to plaster the apartment, or grass to line it withal. It was framed beyond the reach of man, so prying eyes could not look into it; but oh! the song when the day's work was done! It was then that we discovered that our blackbirds were grateful. They gave us the best of what they possessed in return for shelter, food, and that first benefit; and gave it in so unusual a place that everybody wondered.

We were grateful in return to the stable-boys on the other side the wall for not molesting them, though they probably would if they could have got at them in safety; but our eyes were upon them, and boys in those days were not quite so aggressive as they are in these: they still retained some respect for their elders. In short, they did

not rifle the blackbirds' nest. It must be confessed they would have found it break-neck work, for there was neither hold for foot nor ladder in our tall ivy bush.

It was curious that the birds should have chosen a spot so surrounded by human beings and in the heart of a town ; but neither the noisy talk of the stable-yard nor the quieter movements of the frequenters of the garden disturbed them. They built their nest, laid their eggs, hatched their young, and finally reared them.

Of the latter fact there was no doubt ; for one very fine day we espied a party of six blackbirds, large and small, pecking or learning to peck such food as either nature or ourselves had provided for them. The parent birds were giving their fledgelings their first lesson in self-reliance and self-preservation. The corners of turf that peeped out from amongst the flower-beds were scarcely large enough for such a family party ; but they accommodated themselves to their surroundings, which was setting a good example to their neighbours.

But the earth must be replenished, and men and blackbirds are desirous of change. Parents, too, are ambitious for their offspring, and anxious to see them make a start in life.

Our blackbirds started theirs, we suppose, in the big garden, whither they encouraged them to wing their first flight ; and they also made many efforts in the little one. The young brood finally disappeared ; not so the old birds. They never forsook us, and we were gladdened by their presence and song year after year.

How long do blackbirds live ? We quitted the house with the miniature garden long ago, but have been since told that a pair of blackbirds visit it periodically, and that they are called by our name.

Was it gratitude or greed that caused these birds to give us of their best—their song and their progeny ? And we ask the same question in regard to another incident occurring in the same garden, in connection with their natural enemy, a cat.

This was the wildest of forsaken cats, that nobody could tame. How or where she lived and had managed to grow from kittenhood to cathood was a marvel to us all. She was a lean, lank tortoiseshell, with hungry eyes, limp whiskers and long, thin tail. If you looked at her when she chanced to appear, she vanished over the wall like a flash of lightning. Such a wretched, hunted creature could but call forth one's pity, and pity in John Bull's eyes means food.

So we placed food in the most remote corner of the little garden, under the ivied wall, just opposite the blackbirds' ivy-bush. Naturally, other cats scented it, and ate it ; but we ruthlessly hunted them off, and had at last the satisfaction of seeing the poor outcast furtively devouring the meal.

As time went on she came pretty regularly for the food ; not by day, but in the evening, as if reassured by the gathering shadows. She was unmolested, but by no means tamed. We had a handmaid

of somewhat cold manners but warm heart, who became interested in the process. Sly saucers of milk were placed nearer the house, but with no effect. She was not to be enticed into human society. The mere sight of the "face divine" was effectual in sending her off.

We suddenly found, however, that she took to frequenting the ivy that grew above her dining-room. We shrewdly suspected that she made of it a sleeping apartment. At any rate, she was safe there, for the wall was high. But we had not anticipated results.

One fine morning we saw our wild friend force her way out of her ivied chamber with a kitten in her mouth. She descended the wall, placed the burden in her dining-room, and re-ascended at a bound. She came out again with another kitten, which she carefully laid near its brother, or sister, as might be. A third was brought out into the light of day from its leafy birthplace, and the three miserable little creatures were literally heaped up, if not on our doorstep, not very far from it. Three city Arabs all at once! What could we do with them?

The mother leapt upon the wall again, and surveyed her offspring from that vantage-ground. She had brought them into a troublesome world, and had done the best she could for them, and had, at the same time, like the blackbirds, shown her grateful sense of bounties received by presenting them to her benefactors.

The sun poured his rays upon them, and we felt sure they would lose their sight. But they were blind already—not "three blind mice," but three blind kittens. We laid them on a piece of carpet; we provided meat and milk for their affectionate parent; we did our best. Self-preservation was stronger than instinct in the maternal breast, and we are compelled to acknowledge that the wild mother did not pay much attention to her young. Happily for her and us, they died speedy but natural deaths, and were consigned to an untimely grave in, we fear, the ash-pit. She evidently believed that we should do for them what we had done for her, and presented them to us accordingly.

After their demise she was either tamed or disconsolate, for she actually ventured to descend the steps that led from garden to door. By degrees she took her food in the little court, then—Oh! proud moment in the life of our Betsy!—actually walked into the kitchen. There she remained henceforth, a kitchen cat.

She did not favour the parlour much, though she would occasionally peep in. She learnt to purr and fawn and rub her face against us, and to behave much like other cats. The shrew was tamed.

But she still hated boys, and looked on them as red-handed assassins. At the same time she was herself a red-pawed assassin; for she killed our rats and mice like the grateful beast she was. She even slew a monster rat that used to walk up and down our attic-stairs with the heavy footfall of a man, and had been seen taking a solemn constitutional right round the garden.

At first we believed this rat to be a robber, which he certainly was ; then he became a ghost, and Betsy was afraid to mount to the attic. But one night she met him bodily on the stairs, and had she encountered an inmate of another world her screams could not have been more fearful. He appeared to us occasionally, and we grew rather interested in him, wondering at his great thud, thud, as he prowled about at night. A rat's tread is only to be compared to that of a person with rheumatism in his feet : at least, when he walks up and down stairs.

But ours was "the cat that killed the rat," and she watched him buried in the grave that had entombed her own small family. In times of war, enemies occasionally sleep the last sleep together, and a perpetual warfare goes on between cats and rats.

Is there anyone obtuse enough to refuse to see that the cat and blackbird were grateful? In return for small favours, they gave us all they had ; they even brought us their small families in proof of their gratitude ! Doubtless many a poor person would thankfully do the same.



THE VANISHING YEAR.

BORN in rejoicing and cradled in hope,
Pointing new paths for adventurous feet,
Promising power with the future to cope,
Whispering low of the summer-time sweet,
Camest thou hither. Now nearing thy bier,
What dost thou leave us, O vanishing year ?

Joy was not seldom o'ershadowed by grief ;
Hope's soaring pinion salt tears have bedight ;
Sometimes the road forced a sigh for relief ;
Often did weakness turn back from the fight ;
Summer but lives as a memory dear—
What dost thou leave us, O vanishing year ?

Little, ah, little the harvest we know,
We who seek treasure where treasure is none ;
Wind-tossed and rain-kissed, we let the fruit go,
Eager that perishing flowers may be won ;
Murmuring sadly when these disappear—
What dost thou leave us, O vanishing year ?

Haply had sorrow a mission of love ;
Black disappointment taught wisdom at length ;
Weary, we learned to find comfort above ;
Beaten, we trusted no more in our strength.
Then, though its value be reckoned not here,
Gracious thy guerdon, O vanishing year !

'SYDNEY GREY.

ISABELLE'S WAITING.

BY MISS BETHAM-EDWARDS.

PROLOGUE.

A HEART-BREAKING task had fallen to the share of a young French officer stationed in Algeria.

His friend and comrade, the versatile, affectionate, enthusiastic military engineer, Raoul Rivière, lay dead of sunstroke in the adjoining room; his funeral was to take place at sunset.

Meanwhile, with all possible dispatch, his goods and chattels were now to be packed for transmission to France. The young man's eyes were red with weeping, and every object around but heightened his grief: the pianette the accomplished musician contrived to carry wherever he went, the dashing water-colour sketches with which he had adorned his walls, the small case of books in French, English, and Italian, each giving evidence of fastidious literary taste, the numerous little works of art collected during his travels.

This poor lodging in a semi-French, semi-Arab town, on the borders of the Great Sahara, was a tiny temple dedicated to beauty. A few years ago nothing easier than to recall Haroun-El-Raschid in out of the way spots of French Africa. Every piece of furniture was here a gem of Eastern art or handicraft, from the antique lamp fastened to the ceiling, to the mellow-tinted carpets, work of Moorish weavers not as yet vitiated by orders from Manchester.

These rich and lovely things were now ownerless, and as the young Captain removed each from its place with loving hands his tears fell afresh. Once or twice he quitted his post to enter the inner room, and there, drawing aside the cerecloths, gaze on the face of his dead friend.

"For this were we born!" he murmured, contrasting the scene before him with the recollection of two days before. Then those rigid hands had glided over the keys making the place alive with music; those eyes, now closed for ever, had beamed with intensest enjoyment of life; from those pale blue lips had fallen flashes of wit, happy conceits, suggestions all his own. A few hours later, and even the little left of this glorious young career would have vanished. A stone crucifix recording name, birth and demise, in a spot on the outskirts of civilization, would preserve the memory of Raoul Rivière—for whom?

"It is hard, too hard," mused the survivor, fortunately having scant leisure for grief. With rough tenderness and soldierly precision he continued his business, soon turning the elegant little room into chaos and desolation.

All was finished in time for the last sad scene. It is not easy to lend anything like pomp to a military funeral under such circumstances, but perhaps this one seemed less sordid to outsiders than to the solitary mourner. Why such indecent haste and sacrilegious bustle, such poverty of ceremonial and cold routine?

Priest, acolyte and chorister boys now hurried towards the death-chamber, a crumpled white cloth was thrown over the denuded dressing table, two wax candles were lighted, then with indecorous swiftness and unconcern, the preliminary prayers were got through. The tawdriness of the preparations, the soiled robe of the officiating priest, the dingy vestments of the assistants, hastily flung over their ordinary working apparel, the utter absence of solemnity and feeling, gave the Captain a keener pang than even the realisation of his friend's death. More hastily than words can describe, the coffin was now fastened down, a tattered, faded Tricolour used as a pall, on it the young officer's uniform was folded, and six bronzed French soldiers in Zouave costume put their shoulders to the burden.

Without, had gathered a motley little crowd, their deep-hued complexions and gay dresses conspicuous in the glow of wondrous sunset. On the opposite side of the road a detachment of shabby-looking soldiery, headed by their commandant, awaited the body. Bedouin children, beautiful as angels, impudent as Parisian gamins, clung to the lintels, only prevented from making a rush within in hopes of petty plunder by the Zouaves keeping guard above; with arms akimbo and expressions of mingled curiosity and contempt, stared Arabs, here glowering with the fierceness of the desert; mingled with these, Jews, Negroes and Kabyles, the graduated scale of complexion varying from deepest olive and walnut brown to jet black.

Priest and acolyte, not too reverentially received, made uncere- monious way through the rabble; and the Captain, hastily donning sword and képi, following coffin and bearers, came last. Noisily turning the key and pocketing it with a meaning look at the would-be pilferers, he joined his chief outside; then, muffled drums and mourn- ful music sounding, the little procession moved off, followed by picturesque stragglers.

A wilder scene could hardly be imagined; never, certes, did Christian burial take place under stranger, more savage circumstances.

As the funeral train gradually wound upwards from the street, a wide, monotonous, yet grandiose panorama opened to view.

Far as the eye could reach stretched sweep upon sweep of steppe, apparently interminable threshold of the interminable desert. Beyond these plateaux of waving grass and reeds, hundreds of thousands of acres as yet held in undisputed possession by the Bedouin, lay the great Sahara, itself no more of a mystery than the bordering trackless wastes, all of subdued yet resplendent tints in brown and gold.

This evening an intense effulgence filled heaven and earth, the sky of pure amber, the wilderness showing ripples of orange and purple on

the umbered surface. Here sheep pasturing in the foreground looked like little lumps of rich gold ; there the dark tents of the shepherd broke the brown uniformity.

Contrasted with the landscape, wild, romantic, and lovely as any ever ready to the painter's hand, was the little town, a congeries of nondescript buildings without pretensions either to grace, hygiene or comfort. Low one-storied tenements of Jew or negro vendors, Moorish dwellings presenting a blank, white, windowless wall to the street ; French cabarets with the usual green shutters, oleanders and pomegranates in pots, round tables before the door ; a formal, brand-new barrack, from which waved the Tricolour ; a church equally new and unattractive. That was all.

Beyond the little suburban boulevard, on a hillside fronting the great plateaux and the desert, lay the cemetery, of a few years' date only, nevertheless sprinkled with cheap wooden crosses painted blue and grey, and hung with black and white or yellow wreaths. Here and there were new-made graves, piled with huge stones, defences against the ghoul-like jackals and hyenas, midnight depredators in the sacred enclosure.

Faint atmosphere of sacredness seemed to hover about the place in the eyes of the sullen, dry-eyed mourner. He wept for his lost comrade no longer, sentiment were here wholly out of keeping. The commandant wore an absent look of regret, he could but mourn the premature death of so gifted and promising a soldier ; his men were subdued also, the same fate might befall any one of themselves to-morrow. As to the other spectators, they testified no more emotion than if the horse of the young military engineer, instead of its owner, were about to be laid to final rest.

Next morning, weary, dispirited, out of heart with his lot, the Captain was sipping his coffee, when a tap at the door aroused him.

"My Captain," said the intruder, the military servant of his dead friend, "after we had nailed down the cases and cleared my master's room last night, we found this behind the piano."

Here he produced a sketch book.

"As the luggage had to be despatched at daybreak, I thought it best to bring the book to you. You will see it is of no value, only a few daubs. You will do as you think fit about sending it to France, the commandant says."

"Thank you, my good Jean. Here," the young man said, giving the bearer a two-franc piece. The sight of the album and the feeling that it was his own cheered his dreary mood. The sketches might be of the hastiest, they would give his friend's impressions, however fugitive ; recollections of happy, vivid moments. The posthumous gift seemed in some degree to soften the bitterness of parting. The sight of the water-colour drawings would not only bring back the sketcher's moods, but also something of himself. With a sob rising to his throat, he opened the volume.

The first two or three leaves were turned with careless sadness. He was hardly in the humour to admire, much less to criticise; but he soon found his attention riveted by the strange, almost unearthly beauty of the scenes portrayed—scenes unreal in the sense of being utterly unlike anything familiar to him, at the same time informed with the realism of natural beauty. A cursory glance convinced him that every one of the fairy-like sites had been beheld by the eye, and were no mere phantasies of poetic imagination run riot.

The pictures were evidently a series, illustrating different phases and aspects of the same place. The beholder hardly knew which was most bewildering, the ethereal beauty of outline, or colour.

It was a city exquisite as Venice, but without her lagunes; perfect as Athens, yet towering over no blue *Ægean*; august as Granada, although no Vega lay stretched at its feet.

The silhouettes, airy, graceful, colossal, proclaimed no especial civilization, whilst the prevailing tints, delicate blue greys and purest azure, indicated a transpience of atmosphere equally hard to identify. This mysterious metropolis seemed to possess a climate as well as an architecture of its own. The columns, towers, and pinnacles of silvery amethystine hue were interspersed with hanging gardens, lawny spaces and bosquets of dazzling gold green; the very citadel and lines of outer fortifications were tapestried with verdure. And skilfully indeed had the artist caught the translucence and limpidity of the light and the subdued brilliance of the pile: raised by whom? for whom?

This strange, yet real city appeared to be utterly unpeopled; nowhere could the eye detect sign of life or animation; no sentry patrolled the battlements, no citizens thronged the market-place, no children disported in the squares.

Was it some place on which a curse had fallen, some capital edified in strength and beauty, afterwards found unfit for habitation?

Fascinated, spell-bound, the Captain searched in vain for any hint of identification. But none was to be found. Not a name, not a date was pencilled on the margin; odd that his friend should never so much as have alluded to this experience, have allowed such a souvenir to gather dust behind a piano!

He mused and mused without being able to arrive at any satisfactory conclusion. The young military engineer had travelled in France and the Algerian colonies, but not elsewhere that he knew of, and no recollections of his own helped him to an identification of the site. Did it indeed possess a local habitation and a name? Was it, after all, the mere conjuring up of imagination?

Another solution offered itself. Raoul Rivière, without being in the least degree superstitious, had possessed a morbid inclination for the weird and the marvellous. Certain impressions and experiences he seldom alluded to, because of their very intensity. Might not this mysterious city be connected in his mind with thoughts, dreams, or

events, too solemn for confidence? Perhaps it was connected with some page of his own history! Again, the friendship so precious to both had been of a few months' standing only. Whilst much was told on either side, much, doubtless, remained to tell.

Whatever the nature of the riddle, the Captain determined to solve it, if, indeed, solution were possible. For days, nay, weeks, the mysterious sketches occupied his thoughts, when, quite unexpectedly, his regiment was ordered back to France.

I.

BARELY twelve months before, André had brought his bride home, and never adoring husband wore a sadder face. This blue-eyed, comely, not unprosperous young peasant, wedded for dear love's sake rather than for worldly considerations, was slowly awaking from a delusively fair dream.

His peerless Isabelle, the beautiful, spirited girl, transplanted from a bright, animated southern town to this remote region, drooped like a flower in uncongenial soil. All had welcomed her kindly: the grandmother and grand-aunts, the widowed, disabled uncle, the somewhat uncouth young brothers; but her persistent waywardness—so all regarded it—was gradually transforming these new-made relations into enemies. How should he bear it if the whole household turned against his darling, and worse still, she turned against himself?

It was a superb morning of late summer, and in cool, delicious tints of blue and grey stood out every feature of the wild landscape, a veritable bit of desert eerie in unfamiliar eyes. Yet in those of its youthful possessor, common-place enough! André had been reared amid these solitudes. Neither when covered by the snowy pall of the Siberian winter, nor amid the blinding glare and barrenness of harvest-time, did this stern yet matchless nature awe or terrify him. Truth to tell, the real spirit of the place had never entered his soul. The rigid climate of these lofty limestone table-lands and ungrateful soil were accepted by him as matters of course. Only for his young wife's sake did he now wish everything changed; in sight, a neat village, pleasant meadows, babbling brooks, peach and olive orchards, roses and oleanders, as in her native Aveyron.

The country was the strangest conceivable; as yet a *terra incognita* even to native geographers.

Yon gloomy heights, rising like mountains from the plain, are no mountains indeed, but the lofty steppes of Central France, or Causses, so-called; a name unintelligible except in their immediate vicinity. As dread giants keeping watch over the portals of the world towered the dread Causse Noir and the hardly less formidable Causse Méjean, their broad summits on a level with the peaks of the distant Cévennes, their dark flanks running perpendicularly to the level below.

Opposite, the horizon was bounded by blue ranges, the far-off chains of the Cantal and Auvergne, whilst nearer rose the purple shadow of what seemed a majestic castellated city. This Nineveh of the desert—Babylon of the trackless waste—was the most conspicuous feature of a landscape unrivalled throughout France.

From far and wide its grandiose silhouette could be discerned, now lightsome, golden, airy as the summer cloudage above, now sombre and frowning as the Causses, its neighbours. And nothing could be more solitary or steppe-like than the wilderness separating them; not a spire, not a roof in sight; only wave upon wave of stony undulation; here and there a few sheep browsing on the scant herbage, or a patch of bright green rye or potatoes breaking the grey monotony.

In the midst of this enormous panorama, solitary as an eagle's nest in the cliffs, and as hard to find to the uninitiated, lay the young farmer's homestead, no smiling abode, certainly, for a fastidious, town-bred bride.

The house was a straggling, whitewashed, barn-like building, only approached from the high road, miles away, by a cart-track or traverse winding amid the rocks. The pedestrian would come all at once upon the gardenless, graceless place; close to the front door, a dung-hill; over against these the farm-yard, cattle-stalls and pig-styes, the poultry walking uninvited into the large, smoke-browned kitchen. The construction was solid, and from October to May a wood fire blazed on the hearth. The pot was ever replenished with flesh and fowl; from the ceiling hung huge flitches of bacon; the ancient oak presses were piled with coarse home-spun linen. Home-made liqueurs and jellies stood on the cupboard shelf. These and other evidences of well-being were not calculated to satisfy the aspirations of a girl accustomed to mirrors, pet birds in gilded cages, carpets and other luxuries.

It was Sunday, but no tinkle of church bells could be heard against these wastes. Life at the farm went on as usual, the only difference being that a piece of meat was spitted before the fire, less activity reigned without and within, one and all drowsed in winter and strolled abroad in summer. "If there were only a church within reach!" oft-times sighed Isabelle.

The nearest hamlet lay five miles off, and church-going was therefore impracticable during eight months of the year on account of the snow. A ten-mile walk under ordinary circumstances were no impossible feat, even to a town-bred maiden; but the greater part of the way lay across a scorching, unsheltered plain, the sharp pebbles laming the feet, and the rays of the sun pouring down blindingly. No mass meant no real Sunday; in other words, no putting on of best clothes or saunter with neighbours, bands playing, pedlars' stalls glittering, cafés inviting to lemonade and cakes.

The weird beauty of the scene, the inexpressibly exhilarating air,

the wealth of field flowers around, might have offered compensation to some minds ; on this especial morning even André drank in cheerfulness with the promise of the day, and felt that Isabelle must do so too. After a turn round the farm-yard—on his younger brothers, Charles and Jean, devolved the duty of feeding the cattle and poultry—he re-entered the kitchen.

Two ancient women, still adhering to the costume of the country, sat on low, three-cornered stools, ladling out their morning soup. Almost witch-like was their appearance, their high black head-dresses and stiff bodices, after the manner of stays, recalling local fashions of a hundred years before.

"Where is Isabelle?" asked the young man, as he helped himself to a plateful of soup and sat down by the pair.

"Where is Isabelle?" scornfully repeated the great-aunt, the elder and severer of the two sisters. "Listen, André, your conduct is not that of a man. It is spiritless, idiotic, to put up with such behaviour from a wife ; a girl, too, who did not bring you so much as a half-penny."

"There is no harm in lying abed an hour later on Sunday," rejoined the grandmother. "The day is long enough, Heaven knows ! But 'tis so all the week. Your wife is crueller to herself than to you, my poor André. Look at her pale cheeks. She is fretting herself into the grave."

"And for what?" put in the other, perhaps with pardonable viciousness. "Because she has the best husband ever girl was blest with, a good home, plenty to eat and drink—bah ! it makes me sick, these whims and fancies. Pluck up your spirit, André ; speak out as a man, a husband, should !"

Just then a woman's gown rustled on the bare staircase, and Isabelle entered the kitchen.

No greeting passed between the young wife and her husband's relations. The two old women went on with their soup, never once looking up, whilst Isabelle sulkily received her portion from André's hands.

She was a strikingly handsome girl, with the beautiful features and rich colouring of the South, but a veritable Cinderella in the matter of personal appearance. Her splendid hair was slipping from the comb, her black stuff gown was blue with age and sadly needed a darn here and there ; the very genius of a Frenchwoman, instinctive, exquisite neatness, found among all ranks, was wholly wanting. She seemed to delight in obscuring the radiant loveliness with which she had been endowed : glorious eyes and complexion, faultlessly-shaped nose and mouth, perfect little teeth, and a slender, graceful figure.

As she swallowed her soup, André watched her narrowly. His grandmother's words made him more anxious than ever. Was his Isabelle really pining away, really ill ? He noticed that her complexion wanted its usual glow, and that her ugly black dress hung more loosely than ever about the light, girlish limbs. She had grown

quieter, too, of late, less aggressive towards the grandmother and grand aunt, more forbearing with the young brothers. What did these signs mean?

Just then, the pair of hobbledehoyes entered, good-looking, well-meaning young fellows, but apt to tease their unsympathetic, at times haughty, sister-in-law.

"We are going to the fair," began Charles defiantly, keeping his eye fixed on Jean.

"We are going to the fair," repeated Jean in the same tone of determination.

Like dogs these two ever concerted mischief in company, relying on each other's support for the carrying out of their plans.

"Young men used to go to mass o' Sundays when I was a girl," put in the grand-aunt, "and save their money instead of spending it on peep-shows and low company."

"Why not wait till the hay is got in?" added the grandmother. "What good will you two be to-morrow after walking to Millau and back?"

André glanced at the pensive figure of Isabelle.

"The young horse has done little or no work this week. I've a mind to drive to the fair, if Isabelle would like to go," he said.

Isabelle shook her head, whereupon the two younger men imitated the gesture with peals of laughter.

"That is Isabelle's way," began Charles, the livelier and more malicious of the two. "And so it would be at the fair. Will you have a turn in the merry-go-round? Shake of the head. Will you have some gingerbread? Shake of the head number two. Will you walk, sit down, stay a little longer, or go straight home? Shake of the head."

Jean was about to continue his brother's mimicry when André ended the scene: yielding, affectionate, good-natured as he was, he seldom asserted his authority except when Isabelle's name was dragged into a family dispute.

"Look you," he said. "A single syllable more and I'll lock you both in the empty stable till nightfall. Unmannerly cubs that you are. 'Tis a mercy you will both have to go off in a year a'soldiering."

Both culprits hung their heads abashed, and the ancient women held their peace. André might be right or wrong, but he was here indisputably the master. Their basins of soup emptied, the lads stole away to prepare for the day's expedition. The old ladies busied themselves with housework. The husband and wife were left alone.

II.

HE eyed her anxiously as physician some precious patient, and at last asked in the gentlest voice:

"Why won't you go to the fair with me? Why will you say no to everything I propose?"

The girl's beautiful head was bowed sullenly ; without looking up, she jerked out a wilful reply.

"Take no notice of me ; I cannot change myself. And you know what I said on our wedding-day. I would be happy with you if I could. It is not my fault if I am wretched here."

The young man's candid blue eyes filled with tears. Yes, he remembered those words but too well. The misprized, orphaned, portionless Isabelle had accepted his love, his name, his fortunes with the cold promise—she would be happy with him if she could. And for a few brief, to him inexpressibly exquisite, weeks the pact was kept. His unsparing devotion and self sacrifice in little things were rewarded by gaiety, liking, even affection. She was evidently learning to love him and be happy, when a sudden, inexplicable change occurred. That sparkling, winning apparition, who had even obtained favour in the eyes of the stern grand-dames, and rough homage from her young brothers-in-law, vanished as completely as if the earth had swallowed her up. In her place there moved a pale, drooping, self-centred figure, mute as a mother bereft of her first-born, dejected as maiden whose lover lies in the tomb.

"You mope too much indoors," he went on. "You should get all the fresh air you can whilst the fine weather lasts. Come, fetch your hat. Let us take a turn together."

Isabelle obeyed mechanically.

It was no summer world to her, but assent seemed easier than discussion. They set off in silence. A comelier pair it were hard to find on a French Sunday. If André's face lacked the brilliant colouring and subtle charm of her Southern type, it offered more candour and sweetness of expression. There was a fine glow of health about his sunburnt complexion, whilst his eyes, of deep, soft blue, showed child-like ingenuousness and trust. The features were regular, as is generally the case in these regions, and the form manly, symmetrical and well knit.

These youthful figures, so well matched in point of age, beauty, and social condition, should have made the joyfulest picture imaginable ; in reality, none could be sadder. A burden of care weighed down the husband's naturally buoyant spirits, whilst the wife looked as one who felt herself under a curse, doomed to suffer and cause suffering without fault of her own. They walked side by side, down-cast and spiritless.

"We will have a look at the city," he said.

"Oh, André, why go there?" she exclaimed, with an expression of indescribable shrinking.

"Whither then?" was the careless rejoinder.

Whither, indeed? Here were no green lanes or umbrageous meadows, no olive groves or peach orchards by meandering streams as in her own sunny Aveyron. Instead, the dark, frowning Causses, the rocky and waterless wilderness, and the Eldritch—the accursed city.

Following a narrow path across potato fields and patches of buckwheat and rye, they were soon in the midst of a stony, flowery, absolutely unpeopled waste.

The farm-buildings were now hidden by masses of rock rising on every side, no longer mere stones to be wrenched by the ploughman, but huge columnar piles recalling the mystic alleys of Carnac and Stonehenge. Here and there the grey surface was tapestried with dazzlingly brilliant green which, with the wreath of wild flowers around, softened the prevailing savagery. Everywhere abounded the wild lavender, its delicious fragrance filling the air, the colour of its silvery spikes in perfect harmony with the rocks.

Strange and beautiful as was this scene, crags sparkling as crystal, verdure bright as gold, lavendered sweeps, and far away and around the towering Causses and the Cévennes, it but formed the prelude of witchery to come.

Plodding along for another quarter of an hour, now across a bit of ploughed land, now over stony pasture, the tremendous shadow of the Eldritch city straight before them, they suddenly found themselves under its very walls: above, hanging gardens, domes, pinnacles and battlements; around, vistas of street and public promenade; the whole of lustrous silvery rock, shining against a warm, southern sky.

"Take my hand, my girl," said André, "and let us clamber to yonder terrace. The air is good to breathe there."

Tired of perpetual resistance, Isabelle obeyed; André, agile as Tyrolese goatherd, helping her up the giddy stair.

Huge blocks of limestone here met, with yawning fissures and break-neck clefts between. The task of bestriding these chasms, so full of danger to a stranger, was mere child's play to the young farmer. Isabelle clung to him, and in a few minutes later, breathless and heated, they reached a grassy platform, high as cathedral spire above the level. What a scene here met their unbewildered, irresponsible eyes! The broad earth could show none fairer.

Familiar lines and harmonies were here replaced by forms and tints of unimaginable airiness and delicacy. Nothing, not even the turf carpeting the untrodden ways recalled the world of every day. The very heavens seemed to possess a new, indescribable transparency and loveliness, whilst proudly rising under the golden and sapphire canopy stood a city more beautiful than any reared by mortal hands.

It covered an enormous area this metropolis of the waste. Perched on their lofty pinnacle, the two careless beholders could now obtain a bird's-eye view of the whole. In the pearly, translucent atmosphere, every object was clear and distinct, citadel and domes, watch-towers and portals, all of wondrous lightsomeness and grace; the untarnished silveriness of the building stone in striking contrast with the matchless azure of the sky and gem-like green. There were natural gardens everywhere, flower-beds, bosquets, lawny spaces, town and

country so blended that each citizen had forest greenery at his very doors. A stranger thrown suddenly amid these scenes must have conceived design here—could not have set down the whole as a natural phenomenon. How exquisite, would be the first thought of such a beholder, to inhabit a place planned, we might fancy, for a race gifted with finer perceptions than our own. Or, to indulge another phantasy, were these crystal domes, lightsome mansions, airy arcades, built by some fellow-mortal, believer in the realisation of perfect beauty, high priest of the ideal? No dreams or speculations could seem extravagant or out of keeping.

It was Sunday, but the silence of perpetual Sabbath ever reigned within these precincts. Not a sound broke the eerie stillness: tomb-like desolateness prevailed from end to end.

On this visible fairyland the pair gazed in sullen, brooding sadness. André was wishing all the time that these stately piles could be razed to the ground, and in their place rise crops of corn and potatoes. Isabelle sat with fixed, wistful eyes, trying to see nothing.

"André," she said at last, "why do you stay here? Sell your share of the farm to Charles and Jean, and let us go elsewhere."

"The lads are minors as yet, and what would the grandmother and grand-aunt do without me?" André replied, not so much taken aback by the proposition as she expected. "Besides, who would buy a heap of stones like that?"

And he pointed, almost despairingly, to the superb spectacle before them.

"I won't say what I may do by and by," he went on. "When my brothers are men, and we have only ourselves to think about, I mean. I am not fonder of this place than you are. But it came to me from my father: I have lived in it all my life. If you were only cheerful, I should not envy the President of the Republic himself."

A remorseful expression came into the girl's face as she listened to this speech, not made in anger, but with the quiet pathos of one accustomed to suffer in silence. She averted her head, unable to endure that look of deep, uncomplaining sorrow, and seemed to debate in herself.

"Why do you brood always, and refuse to take pleasure in anything?" the young man went on, determined to take this opportunity of speaking out. "I do not allow anyone to be unkind to you. Our life is no harder than other people's."

"Listen, André," broke in Isabelle, with a look of desperate resolve. "I will tell you the truth; why it is that I would rather be laid in my grave to-morrow than live on here. The place is under a curse."

"So the country folks say. The demon city they have even called these rocks," André replied, ruefully, "and a city they look like. I could swear yonder pile were a ruined watch-tower, such as every city in France can show, and the blocks around, what else do they look like than flat-roofed houses?"

Whilst he glanced curiously around, Isabelle nerved herself to continue.

"The country folks are right. It is an accursed spot, André, and the curse has fallen on me."

The words were hardly out of her lips, he had not caught their full import, when his quick eye discerned two figures moving in the distance.

"Look straight ahead," he cried; "do you see those specks of red and blue? As I live, we have company here to-day. It is some officer with a peasant to show him the way to Millau."

Isabelle's glance followed his own. Yes, the crimson blotch indicated beyond doubt a soldier's uniform, and the bit of blue a goatherd's blouse. The pair were carefully escalading the rocks that might be described as the outworks of the citadel, nearly half a mile off.

To André, the surprise meant but a rare incident, he watched the strangers' movements with curiosity only. Isabelle became greatly agitated. On a sudden, the grassy platform, lodged in mid-air as a balloon, seemed to glide from under her, the glittering panorama swayed beneath her unsteady gaze; for one terrible moment she felt about to be precipitated to the depth below. Deathly pale, trembling in every limb, she clutched at the tufts of wild rosemary within reach, crying faintly for help.

André, who had been watching the strangers on the edge of the rock, was at her side swift as lightning.

"I did not know that you were subject to giddiness," he said, self-reproachfully; "hold fast to me. We will get down at once."

The task was no easy one. Although robust and well-proportioned, he could not be called a rustic athlete, he dared not now shoulder her as many a mountaineer would have done with hardly an effort. How, then, to manage the descent? In bestriding these chasms, a single false step might end in direst injury to both.

No help was within call, not a drop of water within reach. There remained nothing to do but rally her drooping spirits, and brace her for the attempt.

"Come," he said with forced cheerfulness. "Remember that you are mistress of my house. You must make haste and prepare for those gentlemen yonder, they are sure to stop at the farm and want breakfast."

His words gave Isabelle a certain artificial courage. She sprang to her feet and declared herself ready for the venture.

"Now keep your eyes fixed on the sky, don't look down at all," said the young man. "One foot here, one there; hold my hand tight; that is my brave girl. Why, the worst is half over and you are already looking yourself again."

The momentary vertigo was indeed over. When they reached the first landing-place and paused to take breath, Isabelle's pallor had left her. She peered unshrinkingly into the deep, narrow chasms still to be bridged over.

"You are very good to me, my poor André," she murmured.

"Nonsense," was the almost indifferent reply. Her apathy and coldness had driven all sentiment out of him long ago.

Passionately as he loved her still, there was an aloofness about the feeling that made him appear at times apathetic and cold too. He worshipped the Isabelle who had been his bride, not the Isabelle who shared his hearth and home.

Another strained effort or two, the next and less hazardous stages were passed; finally, safe and sound, but flushed and panting, they found themselves again at the starting point—on either side the lavendered waste, high above the sheeny battlements just climbed, before them the labyrinthine streets of the rock-built city.

"You are quite well again? Then I will go and look for the strangers, and do you make haste to the farm. Lay the cloth for breakfast and prepare—well, everything you can think of. These officers have large appetites and are very generous. You will be well rewarded for your pains."

Flushed and eager, with the strangest look in her eyes, Isabelle set off, promising to do her best. André boldly plunged into the stone alleys and arcades, all silent and deserted as a mausoleum.

III.

LIGHTLY as a fawn and wildly exultant, Isabelle sprang over the sweet-scented waste. A brief moment had served to transform her. The look of restlessness, apathy and dreary introspection passed completely away. Instead, the light of joyfulness indescribable beamed in her eyes, happy looking-forward lent brightness to her cheek, the beautiful lips were parted in a smile, and no subterfuge was necessary on reaching home. The prospect of unexpectedly earning a few francs quite accounted for such changed humour to the grandmother and grand-aunt.

"Shall we help you, child?" they asked, wishing in their hearts that the double windfall would happen every day—Isabelle bustling and happy and extra money earned without trouble.

"I can do things so much best alone, thank you," was the somewhat ungracious but alert reply, as the young housewife set about her preparations. With extraordinary dispatch, even in a Frenchwoman, an ample, if homely, breakfast was soon in progress: cabbage and bacon simmered gently in the earthen pot on the blazing wood fire; in another, placed amid the hot ashes, potatoes piled to the brim were being cooked to perfection in their own steam, a spitted fowl sent up savoury vapour, whilst new-laid eggs and freshly gathered chervil were in readiness for the never absent omelette.

Next she very neatly laid the cloth, getting out the finest home-spun table linen, the new cutlery André had won in a raffle at Florac, the little liqueur glasses of rose-coloured crystal with gilt edges, the

coffee cups of pure white Limoges, gifts to him on his wedding-day. Wild flowers are seldom used by French working folks for decorative purposes, or she might have gathered splendid posies by the way. Flower garden there was none, but the beauty-craving Isabelle bethought her of the pomegranate tree, which, with a couple of pink oleanders in tubs, stood on the sunny side of the house, strangely contrasted with their sordid surroundings. Like Isabelle herself, they seemed a dream of beauty amid unsightliness and squalor.

Risking the indignation of the ancient women, she now cut off two or three sprays of the gorgeous blossom, which, in a cheap vase of plain blown glass, wonderfully embellished the table.

Lastly, she made her own toilette.

The grand-dames slept in a small dark room abutting on the kitchen, the lads in a bare attic, whilst the young husband and wife occupied a comparatively comfortable chamber overlooking the farm-yard. It had brick floors, and little in the way of furniture but a handsome bedstead and clothes press of dark stained oak. Carpets, curtains, and other luxuries had not as yet been thought of. The large press, however, contained vast quantities of home-spun, home-made linen, besides the Sunday clothes that transformed this Cinderella of the waste into a princess. Whenever she put on one of her best gowns, even the uncouth Jean and Charles were awed into bluntly expressed admiration.

Here she very carefully braided her splendid hair, and brought out a curious gold-green gown, of no expensive stuff, yet having an absolutely regal look amid such surroundings. With a little sigh of mingled rapture and deprecation, much as if the dress were some evil sprite to be prayed over, some unholy influence to be exorcised, she slipped off her rusty bombazine and drew around her the dazzling, silky folds. The metamorphosis was startling. Beautiful as she had been in her squalor, she now looked like a queen made ready for splendid pageant. Nothing could have better set off her rich, Southern beauty than these shifting, lizard-like tints of warm green and deep gold, the soft stuff falling gracefully as spun silk. A little necklet of filagree gold, earrings to match, and a white, lace-bordered kerchief completed the toilette; then, the last touch added, she sank into a chair listening breathlessly.

How the moments dragged! There came no sound to mark the wane of time, no church bell called the pious to mass, no town clock noted the passing hours. Only the cackling of hens and the quacking of ducks close under her window and the crooning of the grand-dames in the kitchen broke the stillness. The wide waste was silent as the cloudland above, as silent and as unpeopled. Oh, this tomb-like, unearthly silence, thought Isabelle. Were there only street noises and signs of life abroad, she could shake off the spell that bound her, and be careless with the rest. At last she heard quick footsteps and voices outside, and her heart stood still.

They—*he*—had come back!

Swiftly, surprisingly, as in dreams, now passed before her mind's eye the one day of her life that had been life indeed. She saw before her the glorious being whose words had seemed inspiration, whose eyes had penetrated her very soul, whose presence and way of looking at things transported into a wholly new world. They were again sitting together on the outskirts of the phantom city, that evening wrapped in roseate clouds, and she was listening to his impassioned utterances, the wondrous panorama, the golden cloudlet, even the field flower, lending to his speech the spell of poetry. At first the impersonation of joy, every word, look and gesture expressing intensest enjoyment of life, he had saddened before parting. "And you," he said, gazing on her with deep yet sorrowful admiration, "you are strange and beautiful as your surroundings. Tell me, are you happy here?"

That terrible question, asked perhaps lightly, remained unanswered. Was she indeed happy or no? She hardly knew; she had never troubled herself with such an inquiry. Life meant to her daily toil, bread, shelter, matter-of-fact intercourse—no more. But the doubt once awakened could not be set at rest. She turned from him tremblingly; he repeated the words in the softest, tenderest tones, finding her still mute. The speaker drew her towards him, as he might have done a weeping child, and their lips met.

For one brief moment she felt herself understood. That kiss revealed depths of passion in her own nature, now for the first time called forth; that intercourse, all too swiftly ended, betrayed yearnings and inspirations that could never be satisfied. The delicious dream had come and gone. Bitterest tears had atoned for the stolen joy. And now the blessing—the curse was within reach again.

These bewildering thoughts passed with lightning-like fleetness through her brain. Her husband's voice dispersed them and the vision of that past day.

"Isabelle, Isabelle," André cried from below. "Quick, I want your help."

The sound of her husband's voice, so kindly, yet associated in her mind with the most ordinary existence only, recalled her to herself. The world of beauty and romance was unattainable as cloudland, that of common duty and sympathy in material things claimed her.

In a passion of disenchantment and remorse she tore off her dainty, pictorial gown and donned the threadbare bombazine. When André, obtaining no answer, ran upstairs, he found her flushed and agitated, but docile.

"The breakfast is to be packed and sent to the rocks, the officer is busy with his sketching," André said, too hurried to notice her excited looks; "and mind, Isabelle, he will sleep here to-night. You and I must give him our room. He dines, too; see that everything is ready."

There was no time for explanation. With trembling fingers

Isabelle packed the breakfast, taking care that everything should look and taste its best: the roast chicken garnished with cresses, the wine cooled in the fountain, the dessert of home-made brioche and macaroons carefully wrapped in writing-paper.

When André had set off with his burden, she began the remaining preparations, hardly giving herself time for breakfast. Thankful that there was so much to do, she did much more than was absolutely necessary.

"All that trouble for an officer!" said the grandmother contemptuously. "Much you will get rewarded for your pains. It is throwing money into the sea to spend so much good soap about this. Were the walls tapestried with cobwebs he would be none the wiser."

"Tush, tush," put in the grand-aunt, with her usual touch of spite. "Have you lived just upon ninety years without knowing that a képi and sword turn every girl's head? If it were a civilian going to lodge here to-night, Isabelle would not move a finger."

Isabelle made no reply to these taunts, she did not even toss her head scornfully, as was her wont. Without a word she carried broom, pail and scrubbing brushes upstairs, and the pair saw no more of her for hours.

IV.

TWILIGHT gradually stole over the waste, lending its accustomed mysteriousness and witchery. Nothing could be more romantically, ethereally beautiful than the quiet tones and subdued harmonies of the scene now. A soft yet lustrous silveriness wrapped the lower stage, farm buildings, rock-strewn wilderness and Eldritch city, whilst far above and around, the deep violet outline of Causses and mountain rested against a greyish-blue heaven.

But if such the glamour cast by closing day about the landscape generally, what was the aspect of the city itself? that majestic capital, so real, so phantom-like, raised, one felt ready to swear it, by human agency, nevertheless untenanted as Persepolis or Palmyra.

The effect of twilight was here magical, the masses of grey stone gleaming like alabaster in the opaline light, the symmetrical outlines taking wonderful grace and lightness. No place for evil spirits, dread afrits, shapeless gnomes, seemed this; rather the haunt of gracious and beneficent geniuses, ministrants of peace and beauty to man.

Into this weird yet lovely scene stole Isabelle, and no figure could be more in keeping with it. She had exchanged her bombazine for a neat cotton gown, very light in colour, which looked like ghostly drapery as she hastened across the waste. André was feeding his stock. Jean and Charles were not yet home from the fair, the grand-dames watched the numerous earthen pots bubbling amid the ashes; it was surely her place to summon their guest to dinner.

She knew exactly where to find him. He was anxious to avail himself of every ray of light, finishing a sketch, André said, just outside the city. Strange that he should have chosen the self-same spot in which they had sat last year. Surely he expected her! There could be no harm in a hand-clasp, a whispered conference ere they parted for the second time, most likely for ever. She would pour out her loneliness, her yearning and her repentance. He would listen and console, perhaps press her lips to his own as before. Life would be easier after such an interview. Having sipped of the very essence of happiness, she felt as if she should thirst no more.

With flushed cheek, quickly-drawn breath and beating heart, she hastened towards the solitary figure amid the rocks. As she drew nearer and nearer, all doubts and misgivings were set at rest. Yes, she could not be mistaken. The dress, the slight, athletic form, the turn of the head, the very pose were his; just so had he rested his arms on his sketch-book, with upraised face drinking in the deliciousness of the hour.

To the astonished sketcher such an apparition seemed in keeping with the rest. A wraith could hardly have come as a surprise in such a place. When he caught sight of this slender, beautiful girl stealing towards him, as if sure of a welcome, he felt in the humour for mystery, ready to accept unrealities and believe in phenomena the most startling. There was little of the phantom about Isabelle, except her white dress and stealthy, gliding movements; still less did she recall the peasant maiden, daughter or wife of herdsman. It seemed impossible to imagine this glorious creature living amid such surroundings, no hardier, homelier life to be found throughout France.

Meantime the twilight gloom gathered fast. When the pair approached each other there was hardly light enough to discern features, had they been bent on such scrutiny. Without a second thought, only delighting as any young, adventuresome, beauty-loving man might do in the romantic situation, he now sprang to his feet and caught her outstretched hand. But Isabelle, overcome with joy and timidity, averted her face and burst into tears.

"You are unhappy. Make a friend of me. Let me help and comfort you," he said, leading her to a mossy seat, supporting her as she sat, still weeping, with her face buried in her hands.

"You will go to-morrow. My duties are here. We shall never meet again," she murmured. "But a word of sympathy, of kindness from those who understand us, how good it is; and your voice is not like the voices I hear every day. Its tones, so soft, so tender, have haunted me since first we met —"

"Have we then met before?" asked the young man kindly.

That question, neither coldly nor indifferently, but put in a tone of surprise, stopped Isabelle's tears. She grew calm in a moment, chilled by his apparent forgetfulness, deeply wounded by what seemed to her want of heart.

"You were right to forget our meeting. I will forget too," was the proud reply. Then, once more overcome by the passionate longing of the moment before, and anxious to know something more of an existence which, in one sense, was linked with her own, she went on.

"Tell me of yourself. There can be no harm in that. Are you happy—are you beloved? I am only a poor peasant's wife: my business is to cook, darn and spin. But you are gifted, beautiful, favoured by fortune. Your lot should be brilliant. Many and many a time I have wished myself dead. Were I dying to-morrow, the thought that Raoul were well and joyous would bring me peace."

The Captain started. That mention of his dead friend straightway unravelled the whole mystery. Here, then, was a clue to Raoul Rivière's silence about the Eldritch city, the holding back of those wonderful sketches. A French officer of the better class, handsome, fascinating, warm-hearted, how can he choose but make love, be made love to, wherever he goes; leave behind him fond memories in many a girl's heart?

Everything became plain to him now. Raoul had, of course, visited the place; undoubtedly the first soldier artist who had found his way to such a world's end. Between him and the pathetic-voiced, super-b-eyed maiden at his side had taken place an interchange of confidences, may-be of lovers' vows; he, alas! to cross the sea and be stricken down, she to remain behind, yearning for him, expecting him, after the woman's way. That she should imagine himself to be Raoul was natural enough, seeing that strangers rarely, if ever, penetrated these mountain fastnesses.

"You are in error, my poor girl," he began, much moved. "That name on your lips just now belongs not to me but another ——"

Isabelle drew back speechless with astonishment and mortification; then, a little recovering herself, she murmured:

"Forget what I have said; or, if you meet him again, bear a message for me. Say ——"

"No messages can reach him more," the Captain said very sorrowfully. "The Raoul you remember, so brilliant, so beloved, is dead. His grave is made in far-off Algérie, on the borders of the great desert."

"Dead!" cried Isabelle, sinking to the stony seat just quitted. "Raoul is dead?"

How the word changed everything to her, alike the world without and within—life in its outer aspects and the life of feeling and thought! A moment before, she had been possessed by a woman's clinging passion, her little sphere made up of beauteous dreams, spoiling her for the existence of every-day. Now, the prosaic past seemed to shrink into nothingness, she felt dwarfed, bruised and abashed as she contemplated it. Who was she to aspire to flawless happiness and what she regarded as the fulfilment of her destiny, when Raoul's

portion was to be cut off in the flower of his youth, his bright promise unrealised, his splendid powers undeveloped? He was dead, the darkness of the tomb wrapped him round, but she lived on, henceforth a perpetual rebuke to herself. In her desolation, she felt, to use the poet's words, that the grave holds all things beautiful and good. The beautiful twilight, earth with its fragrance and starry dome, seemed to have no meaning. Raoul was dead, the gay, the gifted, the generous. Not for him these flowery wastes, the glorious sky, the strange city of rocks; not for him love and sympathy.

"I have wept too. I loved him as a brother," the Captain said with blunt kindness. "But tears cannot bring him back again. Had we not better make our way to the farm?"

EPILOGUE.

BUT Raoul's voice reached Isabelle from the very tomb. The little episode, so bitterly repented of, confided to the faithful André with tears of shame, was destined to change the course of their existence. As if even unwise impulses of a generous, upright nature may work blessing, the confession of the stolen interview and its consequences brought about a perfect understanding between husband and wife, whilst the discovery of the young military engineer resulted in a wondrous change of fortune to both.

For discovery it must be called; the Eldritch city, apparently fashioned with skill and cunning, but the handiwork of nature only, had hitherto escaped the observation of topographers and geologists. Raoul's pencil had been the first to delineate it; the Captain having, to his great joy, identified the place, noised its fame abroad. Deputations of learned societies published reports, guide-books furnished descriptions, photographers and artists found their way to the marvellous site, the curious followed. Soon the rambling, ill-kept old farm-house was replaced by a cheerful, commodious inn. Isabelle, now neat and zealous, bustled about, no longer finding time for wayward repinings. André and his brothers, leaving farm work to others, acted as guides. Money flowed in rapidly. From May to October the place was alive with strangers, whilst the winter was spent in preparing for their arrival.

Not only André and his family were benefited by the change, the outlying districts being enriched by the yearly influx of strangers. The hitherto accursed city became a Providence to all.

And meantime, the poet's fate:—Raoul Rivière, who, in a certain sense, was the creator of the place, slept in his neglected grave on the borders of the desert. The marvel and beauty he had made visible to other eyes, as with a wand, were shut from his own for ever.

THE GHOST OF CLARE MANOR.

BY CHARLES W. WOOD, F.R.G.S., AUTHOR OF "THROUGH HOLLAND,"
"LETTERS FROM MAJORCA," ETC. ETC.



TRINITY CHURCH.

as snow in harvest. It was out of place; would lose all its creepy-crawly feeling; all its power for setting "each particular hair on end," like the ghost in Hamlet. Our own experience was quite as mysterious as regarded the ghost itself, but the surroundings were far less terrible. Of the key to the mystery we know nothing; it has yet to come, if it ever does come. But no ghost story, no supernatural appearance, was ever yet solved, as far as we know, and this that we have to relate will probably share the fate of all that have gone before. If the veil dividing the seen from the unseen has ever for a moment been lifted, the impenetrable silence has never been broken.

All we can say is that our ghost appeared to us—to three of us—on a sunny June afternoon, amidst the loveliest scenery, the most unghostly surroundings: velvety lawns, well-kept flower-beds, a calm flowing river; and that then, as now, the affair baffled all our attempts to explain it away.

But I will not anticipate.

The whole neighbourhood is beautiful and romantic. What, for instance, can be more interesting in its way than the town of Guildford, with its historical associations and its existing traces of Mediæval architecture? We lately paid it a visit, in company with our old

A FEW months ago* we discoursed of Old Charterhouse and Old Charterhouse School, but we had no space to complete our subject by referring to New Charterhouse School. New Charterhouse at Godalming in contradistinction to Old Charterhouse at Smithfield. We were unable to say anything about this modern uprooting of an ancient and time-honoured institution. The matter had to be left, but it was quite possible to return to it on some future occasion.

Moreover, we had a singular ghost story to relate, and a ghost story in June seemed as untimely

* Summer No. of *The Argosy*, 1890.

friend H. C.—one of many visits—and were more than ever struck by its quaint picturesqueness, its old Queen Anne houses—some

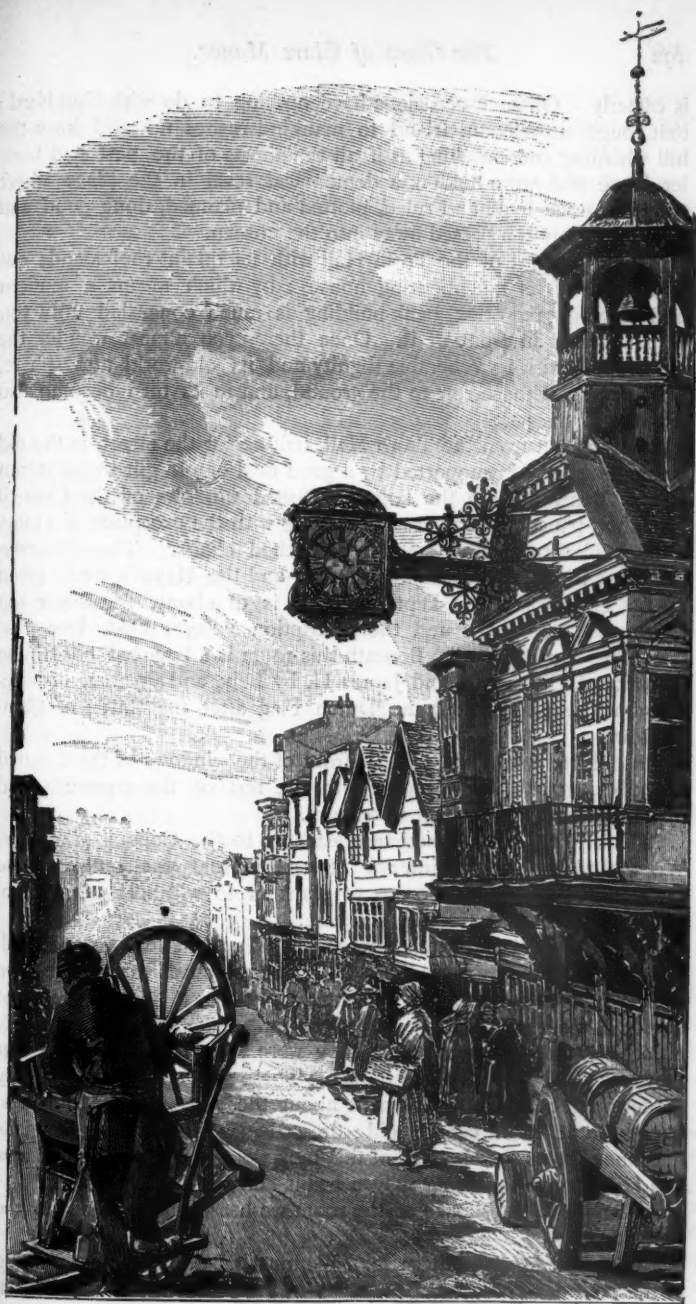
of which are yet comparatively unspoiled—the remains of its ancient castle and its interesting churches.

Leaving the railway station, and turning into the High Street, a scene opens out that can have few equals of its kind in England. High Street, Guildford, the main street of the town, consists of a steep hill bordered on either side by houses, many of which are old-fashioned and gabled. Their quaint, diversified outlines stand out clearly against a background of blue sky, and much that is modern and aggressive is happily lost in this prospective view.

Half way up the hill stands the Town Hall, its open turret—a veritable temple of the winds—holding its solitary bell, crowned by an arrow that tells you too surely when the weather



ABBOT'S HOSPITAL.



HIGH STREET, GUILDFORD.

is easterly. On such occasions have nothing to do with Guildford ; that rough, unwelcome friend to mankind rushes up and down the hill whistling and shrieking as if all the ghosts of the past had been let loose and were holding a demoniacal revel in the place where they had once lived and ruled, plotted and planned, done good and evil, until they too passed away into the unseen.

The upper part of the Town Hall with its quaint roof stands out in advance of its neighbouring houses ; by which means a modern and very ugly red-brick bank-building is much concealed until you actually stand in front of it. Once there, you almost wonder the Town Hall, with its venerable dignity and its old-world atmosphere, does not fall with sorrow to the ground, and in its turn become also a ghost of the past.

Standing out from the Town Hall, half across the street, is the old clock, dated 1688, supported by a good deal of old gilt wrought-iron work. Beneath it are the large mullioned windows of the Council Chamber, panelled, but bare of furniture with the exception of a long, business-like table and some hard-backed chairs. The chimney-piece is curious, and worthy of notice ; and the Mayor's Staff, given by Queen Elizabeth, is kept here. It is of ebony, the silver top bearing the town arms and the inscription "Fayre God, Doe Justice, Love thy Brether." Beneath this room is a large hall containing portraits of Charles II. and James II. by Lely, and a picture of Vice-Admiral Onslow receiving the Dutch Flag after the Battle of Camperdown.

An old iron-work balcony is in front of the windows of the Council Chamber, much in harmony with the rest of the structure, and supported by some ancient woodwork.

A short, dark, narrow staircase leads up to the Council Chamber. We wished to see the interior of a room that was outwardly so interesting. There was no one to grant or to withhold permission, and we ventured up the dark staircase.

The door of the chamber was ajar. Profound silence reigned. We thought it empty and looked in. The room was bare, as we have said, but with a distinctly ancient flavour about it. It was not empty. At the table sat three very wise-looking people, deeply absorbed in papers over which they were poring ; so absorbed that they never looked up at our entrance. These gentlemen were the only modern and incongruous element about the place. They ought to have been at least a century old ; dressed in ruffs and frills, pigtails and knee breeches. Instead of this they wore everything that is new and fashionable, including shaven heads and stiff upright collars.

At length in the silence of the room we heard one murmur to the other two :

"It cannot be met otherwise. We must raise the rates a farthing in the pound. There will be a revolt in the town ; the streets will run with blood."

At least this was what we thought we heard. But there was a great echo in the room that was very confusing, and it may be that we were mistaken and something quite different was said. When we come to think of it, it seems hardly likely that the inhabitants of the quiet and peaceable town of Guildford should rise up in revolt and its streets run down with blood ; and all for the sake of a farthing in the pound.

H. C., indeed, declared that we had heard, as the French say, altogether à tort et à travers : and that all *he* heard, very distinctly, was the following fragment :

"Pray, how is Mrs. Jones this morning, Mr. Jones?"

To which Mr. Jones replied :

"I thank you, Mr. Brown, Mrs. Jones is as well as can be expected." Which only proves that history, like the revolution of the earth, repeats itself.

We quietly withdrew ; but H. C., in a poetical absence of mind, stumbled down the dark staircase, and then apologised to empty space ; upon which there was a great scraping of chairs in the Council Chamber, and evidently some sort of consternation : Mr. Jones probably thinking that he had been hastily summoned home.

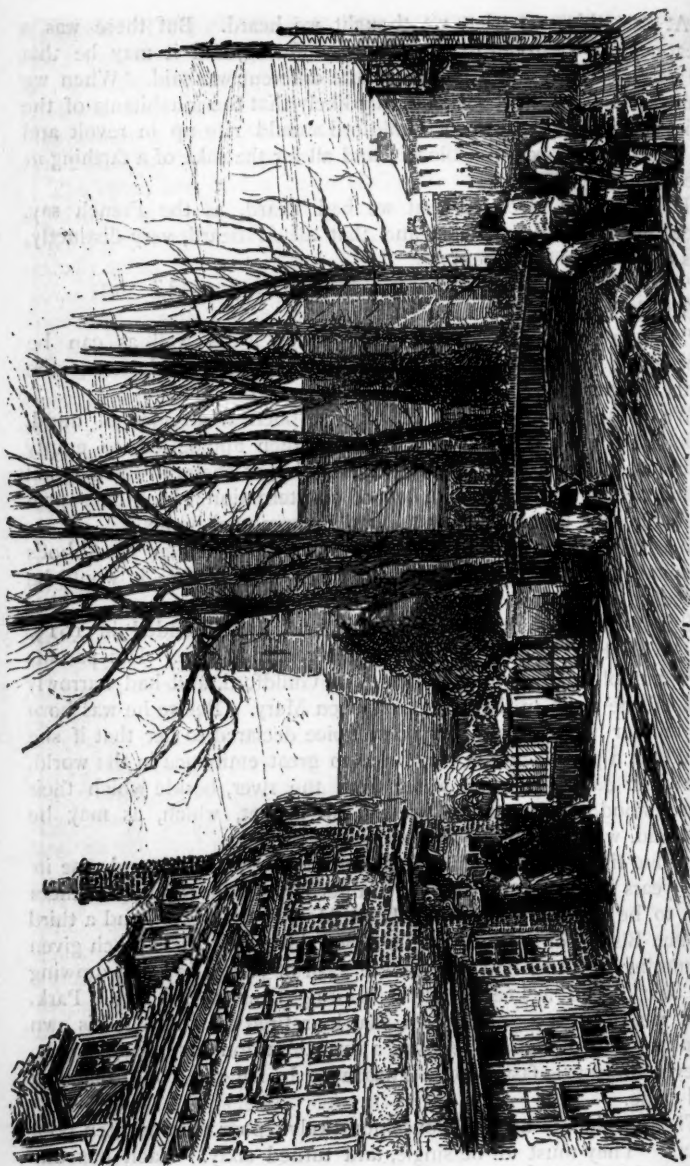
We gained the street and proceeded upwards as far as Abbot's Hospital. A more quaint, charming, old-world picture it would be difficult to find.

It is in the Tudor style, built of red brick, and founded in 1619, by Archbishop Abbot. His story is a romantic one. His parents were humble cloth workers, living in Guildford, and had narrowly escaped the stake in the reign of Queen Mary. Before he was born his mother had a dream in which a voice declared to her that if she would eat a pike, her son would rise to great eminence in the world. The next day in drawing water from the river, beside which their house stood, a pike came up in the bucket, which, as may be supposed, was joyfully dressed and eaten.

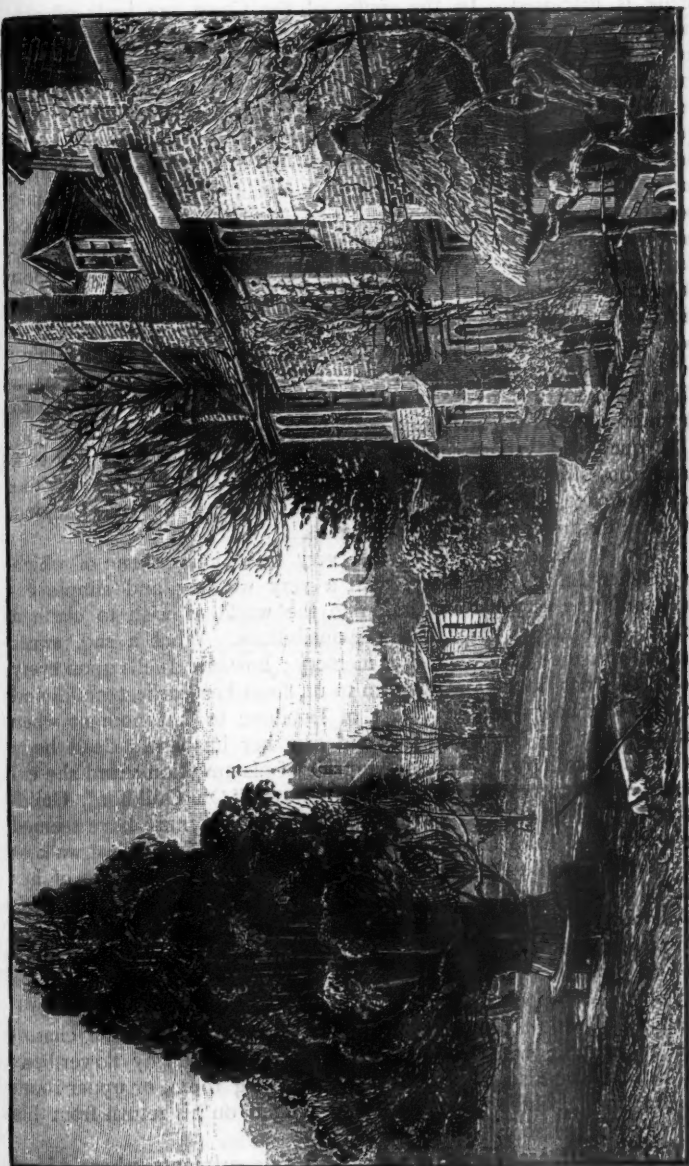
In due time the little child was born into the world, and rose in after years to be Archbishop of Canterbury. One of his brothers rose to be Sir Maurice Abbot, Lord Mayor of London, and a third became Bishop of Salisbury. The good Archbishop was much given to hunting, and one day—it was the 24th of July, 1621—in drawing his bow, killed a keeper whilst hunting deer in Bramshill Park. This was so great a grief to him, that he retired for a time to his own hospital ; and though he received a formal pardon from King James, he ever afterwards fasted on a Tuesday. In August, 1633, his own end came.

The hospital is an almshouse for twelve poor men and ten poor sisters. They must all be single, and turned sixty. Each has one room to himself, and here they live out their days in great peace and quietness.

Passing through the gateway into the quadrangle, a very effective



QUARRY STREET, GUILDFORD.



GRAMMAR SCHOOL, GUILDFORD.

John, wherever he tried his best, and when for a time he
could not find it, he tried it again, and when he had

scene is disclosed. In the centre of the Court are beds of old-fashioned, sweet-scented flowers, kept in perfect order. Not a leaf strews the ground, not a weed dare show itself. Surrounding this garden are the four walls of the building, of a dark red, wonderful and beautiful in tone. The eye rests upon it with delight. The quaint windows and window frames have stone dressings which stand out in contrast with the deep red of the walls. The ancient dining-room has some quaint carving and panelling: the original dining boards of solid oak; a wonderful old settle that one so rarely sees now; a huge fireplace, with dogs, where, in the winter, the "crackling faggot flies," and a cheerful blaze throws its ruddy glow upon the room, and sends out weird lights and shadows, whilst the brothers sit round and give out their experiences, and dwell lovingly upon the past, after the manner of the aged. There is some quaint carving in the large mantelpiece above. This is no longer used as a dining-room, excepting once a year, when the town gives a dinner to the brethren and the sisters.

A quaint old staircase, black with age and well carved, led to a room above, quite as interesting as that below. Here again was the huge fireplace, with its finely-carved mantelpiece, so much in keeping with the dark oak panelling of the walls.

Upon these walls hung several very fine pictures, one of which represents Lady Jane Grey, with a very winning and simple expression; the very last expression in the world to wish to claim a crown, with all its cares and responsibilities. What a sad, sweet halo of romance attaches to her memory; how one dwells upon every detail that has been handed down to us, from her earliest childhood to her last hours in the Tower of London; to that moment when she stood at the Tower window and saw her husband's dead body carried across Tower Hill as the price of his ambition; and she exclaimed, in accents that we can still hear, "Oh Guildford, Guildford!" They had been so recently married; life must have seemed so fair, might have been so happy. We see her in her last walk to the scaffold within the Tower precincts, in the last moments of her life: see her stretching out her hands and asking where the block is placed, bidding the executioner hasten his work. The very Tower itself would be less interesting than it is but for the memory of Lady Jane Grey.

From this upper room you look out upon the world through mullioned windows; and the world that you see is simply the charming quadrangle, with its wonderful tones and the gay flower-beds beneath. You also catch sight of the strong room, or upper room of the tower, where Monmouth was lodged on his return from his defeat at Sedgemoor.

In the south-east corner are the Master's apartments, where Abbot lodged whenever he visited his hospital, and where, for a time, he retired, after shooting Peter Hawkins, the keeper, with his barbed

arrow in Bramshill Park. This unfortunate accident created a great deal of schism in the Church; and the Arminian party declined to receive ordination or consecration from hands stained with blood. But King James was on the Archbishop's side, and declared that even an angel might have accidentally shot a man under the circumstances. The Archbishop lived down the scandal, but never reconciled it to his own conscience. This must be recorded in his favour.

Gazing from these upper windows, right before you is the principal entrance to the hospital, with its high entrance-tower and its domed turrets at the angles; the gates are large and handsome, of open iron-work, the three golden pears of the founder blazoned upon them, and the words: *Deus nobis hæc otia fecit*.

Altogether, next to Old Charterhouse in London, which was founded for pensioners in quite a different rank of life, we think that Abbot's little hospital at Guildford must be the most interesting in the kingdom. And not its least interesting portion is its beautiful little chapel, with its admirably-painted glass (for the period), where Sunday after Sunday this little "band of pilgrims" meet for worship.

Guildford is of very ancient date. It is supposed to have been once occupied by the Romans, but is first mentioned in history by its present name in the will of King Alfred, who bequeathed it to his nephew Ethelwald. Favoured by nature as well as art, it lies in a gorge of the great chalk ridge which stretches from Reigate to Farnham, and forms the southern limit of the Thames Valley.

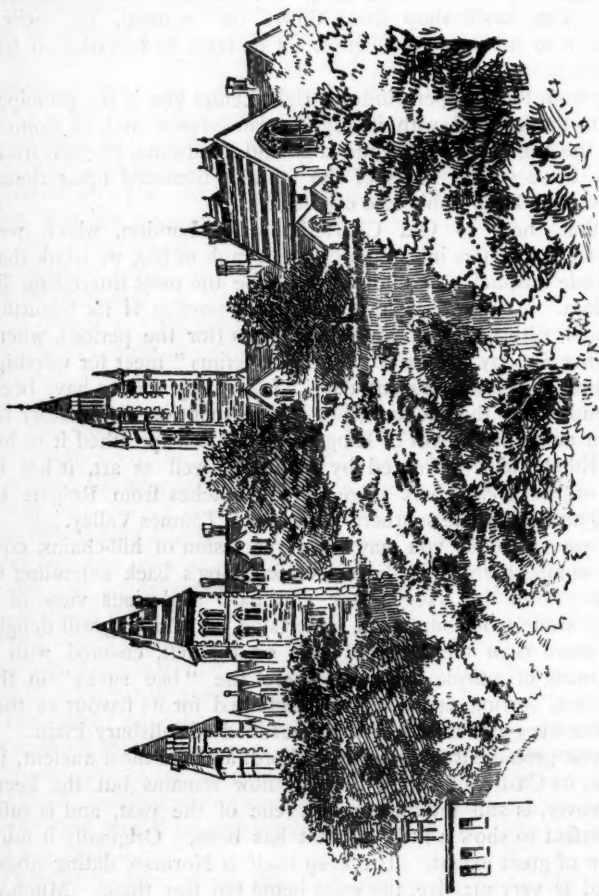
From any eminence you may see a succession of hill-chains, conspicuous amongst which is the celebrated Hog's back extending to Farnham. From this Hog's back you have a glorious view of a wonderful stretch of country on either side, and nothing will delight the eye more than the ridge of hills on the left, covered with a glorious mass of purple heather; where the "bee sucks" in the summer time, storing up honey as celebrated for its flavour as that which other bees gather in the neighbourhood of Salisbury Plain.

The most prominent object in Guildford, and the most ancient, is, of course, its Castle, of which nothing now remains but the keep. This, however, is still interesting as a relic of the past, and is sufficiently perfect to show a little of what has been. Originally it must have been of great extent. The keep itself is Norman, dating about 1150, and is very massive, the walls being ten feet thick. Much of the masonry is the curious herring-bone seen in Roman architecture, and which, in conjunction with the wonderful Roman cement, of which the secret seems to have been lost in the ages, would apparently defy Time itself.

The keep is now a ruin, crumbling and ivy-grown, and with all a ruin's picturesqueness. The staircase leading upwards is built within the walls, and in one part, in the wall itself, are the remains of what was formerly a small private chapel. Traces of rude carving may

still be seen : the Crucifixion and other religious emblems. It is surmounted by a barrel vault, and on one side an arcade of circular arches rest on columns with Norman capitals.

Guildford Castle is an ancient stronghold. Its earliest date is un-



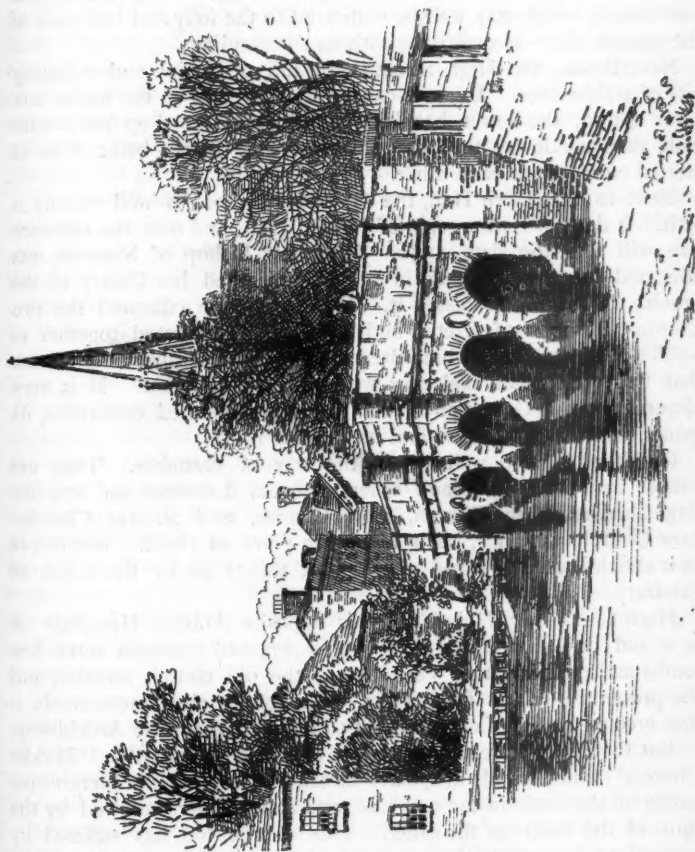
CHARTERHOUSE SCHOOL, GODALMING.

certain, like that of the town itself, but it is first mentioned in history in the eleventh century, and was a residence of the Saxon Princes.

Again it comes prominently forward in the thirteenth century, when Louis of France was appealed to by the barons and offered the Crown of England.

King John, having signed Magna Charta, straightway repented, as we know, fled to the Isle of Wight, procured a Bull from the Pope

annulling the Charta, and endeavoured to enlist an army of foreigners into his service. Louis, the son of King Philip of France, landed at Sandwich, and passed through Guildford on his way to Winchester in pursuit of John. He landed on the first of May, proceeded to London to receive the homage of the barons, and on the ninth of June took possession of Guildford Castle.



GODALMING.

After that it occasionally figures prominently in history down to the reign of James I., who granted it to Francis Carter.

Finally in 1885 it was sold by Lord Grantley to the Corporation of Guildford, who have turned the limited precincts of the Castle into pleasure grounds, with winding walks, and ponds holding gold-fish, and all the accompaniments one associates with tea-gardens and people's parks. It is an incongruous element to have introduced

into a Chapter of History, at war with the dignity and repose that should surround this grand monument of a past age. But so is the march of events in this "age of progress," and we everywhere see recreation grounds surrounding historical fragments, breaking up all the charms and associations of antiquity; and next to a town hall full of Mediæval beauty, the fine outlines and quaint gables of a past age, behold, there arises prominently and aggressively, a red-brick monument, which may well be dedicated to the folly and bad taste of the present day—as compared with its surroundings.

Nevertheless, the High Street is still full of quaint and charming bits of architecture. In some cases the upper part of the house has been spared, the lower has been modernised into shop-fronts with plate-glass windows; the two portions of the house being thus at eternal enmity with each other.

Next to the Town Hall, the Grammar School is well worthy a visit. It dates from the reign of Henry VIII., and over the entrance you will find the date, 1550. Parkhurst, Bishop of Norwich, was educated here; and, dying in 1574, bequeathed his library to the school, which still possesses it. Here, too, were educated the two Cottons, Bishops of Exeter and Salisbury, consecrated together in 1598: a circumstance which drew from Queen Elizabeth the remark that "she hoped she had now well *cottoned* the west." It is very picturesque, this Grammar School, with its mullioned casements, its gables, its dormer windows and its slanting roofs.

Guildford is also well off in the way of churches. They are almost in a line with each other, at equal distances, and are distinguished as High Church, Low Church, and Middle Church: Low Church, we fancy, being highest in point of ritual. But this is as it should be in a world where most things go by the Rules of Contrary.

High Church, or Holy Trinity, is opposite Abbot's Hospital. It is a red brick building, partly ivy-grown, and contains some fine tombs and monuments. Very little of the old church remains, and the present one dates from 1763. One of its chief monuments is that erected by Sir Maurice Abbot to the memory of the Archbishop.

But the most interesting church is that of St. Mary, the "Middle Church," which stands in Quarry Street, overlooking the picturesque banks of the river on the one side, and almost overshadowed by the ruins of the keep on the other. This church, too, has suffered by restoration, but much that is excellent still remains. It lies amidst ancient houses that remind one of some of the quaint, old-world bits one sees in some of the French and German Mediæval towns, but so seldom in England.

The church is built of chalk mixed with flint. The interior consists of a nave and two chancels, the latter terminating in chapels with circular apses. Many traces remain of the days when the Roman Catholic religion held sway in England. The east end of the chapel,

once semicircular, is now square ; and the interior has altogether been much altered and spoiled for the convenience of modern times. Yet it is still very beautiful and quaint, very different from most churches that one sees nowadays.

The oldest part of the church is Norman, and is said to have been built in the reign of Stephen. It once had a richly-groined roof, part of which still remains. The low, square embattled tower rests on four arches. The original windows and the side chapels are Early English, proving that the church was enlarged in the thirteenth century. It is a mixture of dates and a transitional period. The north and south arches supporting the tower are Circular or Norman, and are the earliest part of the present church ; the east and west arches are Perpendicular. The pillars of the nave are Circular and Norman, yet they support Pointed arches.

The corbels which supported the original roof are adorned with monsters whose quaint and grotesque hideousness we have seldom seen equalled. Looking upwards from the west end of the church, the effect is very singular : three steps leading from the nave to the tower, three more to the chancel, which looks framed, almost closed in, by the massive intervening arches.

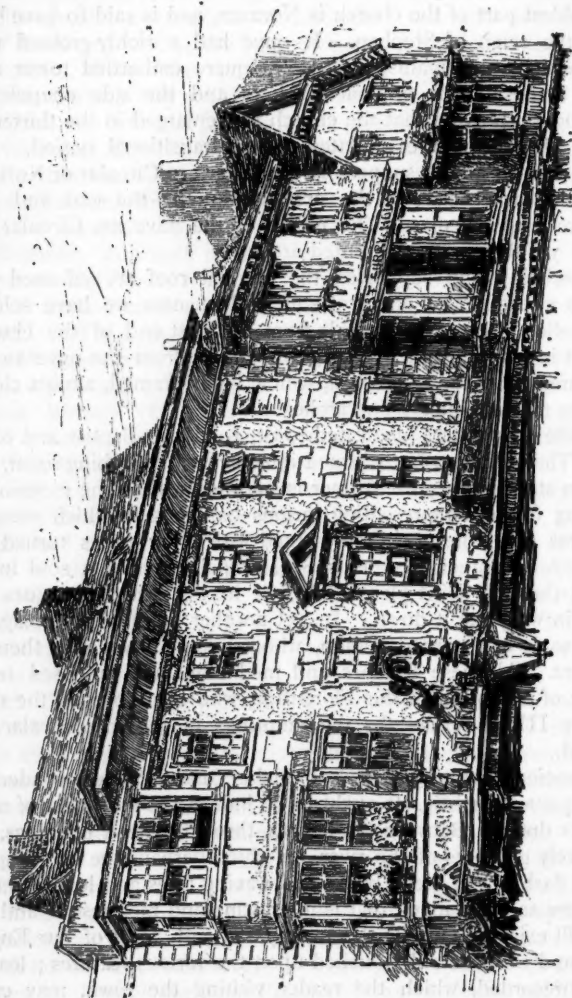
The side chapels are dedicated to St. John the Baptist and to St. Mary. The latter has been turned into a vestry or robing-room, and the organ stands here ; the former is adorned with some exceedingly interesting frescoes representing various baptisms, in which some of the figures are grotesquely represented with their noses turned the wrong way. Another represents St. Michael weighing a soul in the balance ; the evil spirit places his foot in the scale, but does not succeed in weighing it down. In yet another an angel is consigning two lost souls to a horned demon, who triumphantly carries them off to torment. All these frescoes and medallions are supposed to be the work of one William the Florentine, who came over in the reign of Henry III. to undertake the paintings in the king's palace at Guildford.

The ancient houses referred to make Quarry Street wonderfully picturesque and artistic. It ought to be indeed the fulfilment of many an artist's dream. Between the houses, through narrow openings, you catch lovely glimpses of the river, on which perhaps the sun is sparkling and flashing ; of green banks and waving trees and lovers' walks.

Thus we see how much that is interesting and picturesque and old-world still exists in Guildford, as compared with most of our English towns—and we have only touched upon the various features ; leaving much unrecorded, which the reader, visiting the town, may easily discover for himself.

The surrounding neighbourhood, too, possesses many places that are historically interesting. In one of these, Moor Park, lying under the shadow of Crooksbury Hill, we have spent many happy hours as the guest of the late Mr. La Trobe Bateman.

Moor Park was originally in the possession of Sir William Temple, and is for ever connected with recollections of Swift and Stella. It became the retreat of Sir William Temple in 1686, after the death of



HIGH STREET, GODALMING.

his son, when he withdrew from public life. It was here that William III. taught Swift to cut asparagus in the Dutch way; "and the king," says Swift, "always ate the stalks as well as the heads." But this surely must have depended on the asparagus, for scarcely

an ostrich would venture upon the stalks of much that is now sent to market.

Swift, as Sir William Temple's secretary, served him for twenty pounds a year and the privilege of boarding at the second table. We all know the picture of the uncouth, eccentric young Irishman, possessing a genius no one then dreamed of, but which was one day to become world-wide: and that of Stella, who was Lady Gifford's waiting-maid, bright, sparkling and lovely, the favourite of her mistress and the ornament of the servants' hall. We all know the history of the loves of Swift and Stella, which have taken rank with the celebrated loves of the rest of the world: those of Laura and Beatrice and Héloïse: and in which of course there was a most unhappy element.

Stella's abode, embowered in green, is still one of the prettiest spots of Moor Park. If love could ever be happy in a cottage, surely it is here. From its windows you may see the grounds of the neighbouring estate of Waverley, with the ruins of the old Cistercian Monastery: which suggested to Sir Walter Scott the name by which he distinguished his series of novels.

So, roving, we come to Godalming, which consists chiefly of one long street on the south of the Wey.

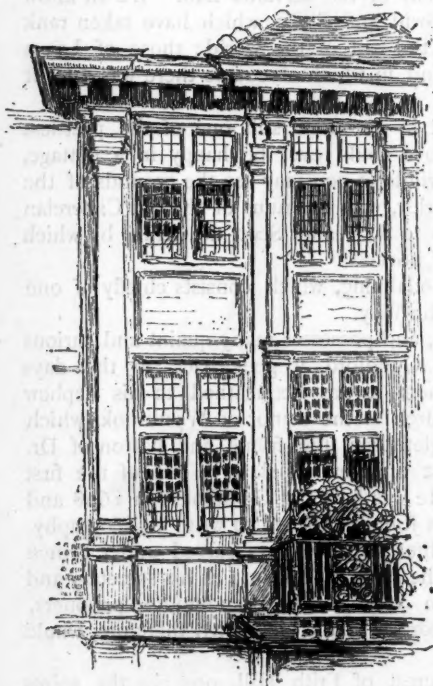
Godalming, too, is ancient, and possesses many quaint and curious bits of architecture. Like Guildford, it goes back to the days of Alfred the Great, by whom it was bequeathed to his nephew Ethelhelm. Close to the church is the manor of Westbrook, which once belonged to General Oglethorpe, the friend and patron of Dr. Johnson, one of our earliest opposers of slavery, one of the first reformers of our prisons. He was born at Godalming in 1698 and died in 1785. It is said that Johnson wished to write his biography. He led an active and varied life; in early days served under Prince Eugene, and was present at the siege of Belgrade as his secretary and aide-de-camp, and went out to America with seven hundred prisoners, and founded a colony in Georgia. His biography, therefore, would have been an eventful one.

Above the town, on the crest of Frith Hill, now rise the spires and building of New Charterhouse; new in point of situation, old, as we know, from the point of antiquity.

Some courage must have been needed to remove the school from the time-honoured precincts of Old Charterhouse in London. It must have been an uprooting of traditions, of associations, of memories sacred to the past. Every room was haunted with ghosts; those ghosts amongst which we love to linger; every stone had been trodden by feet that had gone forth to fame and glory; the quadrangle had echoed with voices before which the world had afterwards bowed down.

All this had to be forsaken: the old given up for the new. The old *esprit de corps* was buried of necessity; a new one must spring

up amidst the Surrey hills, and this would take time. Everything takes time; Rome was not built in a day. Nevermore would the boys' faces appear at the chapel of Old Charterhouse in their appointed places, so great a contrast with the faces of the aged Brethren in the centre pews, so marked an illustration of youth and age: the one passing into the sere and yellow leaf, life practically over; the others with all of life before them, possessors of the world; time and strength, ambition and opportunity, all theirs.



WINDOW IN HIGH STREET, GUILDFORD.

It was a sad upheaval, a terrible exodus. And yet it was wisely done: how wisely the result has proved: how wisely anyone can decide for himself who will go and explore the lovely and classical haunt of Old Charterhouse, breathe its close, confined air, lose his way in the fogs of winter, note the surrounding purlieus which are "cabined, cribbed, confined," unsavoury and over-populated; and then go straight down to Godalming, and, from the brow of Frith Hill, look around upon all the glorious prospect of the Surrey hills and vales, note the richness of the waving, whispering trees, the sparkling waters of the Wey, breathe the pure air of heaven, exult in the blueness of the sky, the brilliance of the sunshine,

the lovely lights and shadows of the landscape. Old Charterhouse is a rare gem in a rude, rough setting; New Charterhouse has taken up its career in one of the loveliest spots of England. Here life becomes a poem.

A large pile of buildings, with a mixture of the Early English and Decorated styles, there is a great deal about it that is very picturesque, and the towers rise very nobly above the surrounding trees. It is a little world of its own, enclosed as it were within its own precincts, the houses of the masters rising up here and there; the whole separated by a mile of uphill from the town of Godalming.

It had been our pleasant fate to go down rather frequently of a Saturday afternoon, so that the Charterhouse became quite a well-known haunt, a familiar friend. On these occasions my companions for most of the time were two young Carthusians whom we will distinguish as H. Major and H. Minor.

They have appeared before in these pages in scenes across the water, where mischief was ever the order of the day, and sometimes ended in a threatened summons before the Juge de Paix. The reader may not have forgotten Mademoiselle Henriette at Guines, who gave them their hearts' desire in the way of jam and galettes, and declared them to be angels when they had upset a huge water-jug in her best bed-room, flooded her carpets, turned her bolsters and pillows out of the windows, and generally *bouleversé* the whole establishment.

Mademoiselle Henriette was a signal example of an honest, large-hearted and generous woman, and the consequence is that she has retired upon a large fortune, drives her *équipage* and enjoys life; all obtained from a small country hotel. The Lion d'Or has changed hands, and we have never since had the courage to enter it. Not long ago we passed by; it looked the same as ever, with its open windows and its green shutters thrown back, its door thrown wide, and its small tables on the pavement. But we would not enter; with a sigh given to the light of other days we went our way. Looking backward, there are certain weeks or months in the years, and we would give the wealth of the Indies to live them again; they held a charm and a happiness that to dwell upon is almost pain. Yet who that has had them would be without such days and recollections?

We passed by the Lion d'Or and went our way; and that way led us into the Bois de Guines; that lovely and extensive forest, where you may lose yourself in quiet, sylvan paths, the trees overshadowing you, brushwood growing beneath your feet, where the squirrels peep at you from the branches with their bright eyes, give their tails a frisk and dart away out of sight. There is a wide carriage path right through the wood, and the wheels bowl over the soft mossy turf with scarcely sound enough to disturb the rabbits nibbling the grass at your very feet; no noise, excepting when the driver cracks his whip and wakes the echoes of the woods. Here and there you catch long, lovely vistas of forest, the trees looking like sentinels in eternal sleep. There are green glades that were made for picnics, only no one ever goes there. The French do not understand that thoroughly English delight. Their idea of happiness is to go to a café, and within four walls, amidst smoke and a stifling atmosphere, much noise and merriment, pass through the laughing hours. Very laughing and happy they make them.

Well for Mademoiselle Henriette that it is so, or her Sundays would have been less crowded and she might never have retired as a

Personage and a *rentière*. People do not always get their deserts in this life ; or if they come, it is too often when the song has left the bird and the golden days of youth have flown for ever. The calm and philosophical age has been entered upon, and even "great possessions" will cause no flutter of emotion or disturb the balance of the mind.

But this is wandering from our subject.

One Saturday afternoon the two Hs had met me at Godalming station. It was a glorious day. The sun shone in an almost cloudless sky. There was just sufficient breeze to rustle the leaves and make music in the branches. It was the month of June—the perfection of time and weather. The air was full of the scent of roses.

We chartered one of the open flies at the station ; quite a magnificent barouche, with a driver in livery of a green so bright that, somehow, he reminded one of Robin Hood. Not that our driver had anything of the robber about him ; he was, as yet, hardly out of his teens, and he was very just in his demands, and modest in his after expectations.

We started for Guildford. It is a lovely drive, through undulating country richly wooded, with here and there a stretch of common to mark the contrast. Occasionally we passed a charming country seat belonging to those whose lines have fallen in pleasant places. Approaching Guildford, you come to the ruins of St. Catherine's Chapel, where it is well to get out, climb the hill and survey the magnificent prospect, framed into pictures by the outlines of the windows. In yonder mill-pool formerly stood the "ducking stool," the terror and punishment of shrewish women : an institution evidently done away with too soon. The river Wey here flows between green meadows, catching up and distributing around myriad flashes of sunlight. A little way off the roofs and towers of Guildford rise up, crowned by the ruins of the Castle.

On the summit of a distant hill is the ruined chapel of St. Martha, standing out solitarily against the background of the pure blue sky. The legend has it that two giant sisters named Martha and Catherine built these two chapels with their own giant hands, with nothing but one hammer, which they threw from hill to hill as each required it. It is a small but very picturesque ruin, that of St. Catherine's, representing the religious element, as the Castle represents the warlike. Not far from here you may trace the course of the Pilgrims' Way : the road followed by the pilgrims in the days before the Reformation, when pilgrimages to the Canterbury Shrine took place in England, just as they still do abroad to other shrines.

We passed the ruins and had soon entered Guildford, and, dismissing our Robin Hood, were left to our own devices. These invariably took a certain unspoken direction, towards the top of High Street, where a celebrated confectioner dealt in admirable ices. Ices

have been a weak point with schoolboys from time immemorial, and are likely to hold their own to yet unborn generations. To the lady who dispensed the ices we were familiar objects, and it was unnecessary to give any orders on entering. Sometimes, the ices being unusually superlative, the two Hs would return to the charge, with a slight blush by way of apology, and the president at the counter would give a smile, which said as plainly as if it had spoken, "Boys will be boys," leading to an undertone from the two Hs which it would be unwise to record.

After this, they, always taking the initiative, would descend the hill, turn in to the White Hart, and order a heavy tea to be ready punctually at six o'clock, with unlimited jam and fruit. We were always their most obedient servant, retiring modestly into the background. Their part was to order and command; ours merely to settle up the small accounts and return our grateful thanks for the privilege.

So, on this Saturday, all this being satisfactorily accomplished, we proceeded onwards and downwards to the bridge that so picturesquely spans the Wey, and hired a boat. My tyrants decided that it was exactly the day for a lazy row on the river, where we might enjoy the cool plashing of the oars, the reeds that grew by the river side—if haply there should be any—the lights and shadows of the landscape. "You can have the ropes and do nothing but steer and take life easily," said they, magnanimously. "We will work for our living, and of course you will give us good wages. Only be careful not to run us into a barge or a boat, or on to the bank."

For this had now and then happened on other occasions, when perhaps the mind had drifted into absentee-ism, or the attention had been caught by a lark soaring overhead, "ever singing as it soared," or by pictures in the clouds beyond.

I obeyed humbly, conscious of previous shortcomings; remindful of expressions upon their faces, on such occasions, of a pitying compassion infinitely more cutting to the feelings than the sharpest rebuke.

It was certainly a very glorious afternoon. The sun was shining in full power; there was scarcely a cloud in the sky. I wish to impress this upon you. No day could have been less ghostly. None could have supposed that ghosts would be abroad. If ever ghosts had haunted our imagination, they certainly did not to-day. Who thinks of ghosts in June? As I said just now, they seem as out of place as snow in harvest. Though if there are ghosts, no doubt they have all times for their visitations: like Death, they claim all seasons as their own.

We had drifted a long way down, lured into insensibility of time by the dolce-far-niente character of the afternoon. H. Major suddenly remembered that such a thing as a heavy tea had been ordered, and that it was too good a thing to be kept waiting; and he gave the word of command to turn. We had gone further than we had intended.

On our backward journey we caught sight of a board near the

river, intimating that the place was to be let. Rowing against stream was hard work this hot afternoon, and the two Hs, resting upon their oars, looked about them.

The banks of the river were low. A few rushes grew there, and we teered the boat into them with a delicious sound. Fair lawns spread out before us; trees stately and waving; flower-beds kept in the perfection of order. The perfume of roses was in the air, and roses grew in profusion. Every choice specimen seemed there; from the old-fashioned, sweet-scented cabbage-rose, to the delicate and refined Gloire de Dijon and Maréchal Niel. Far in the background stood a house of noble proportions; it was ancient and built in the Elizabethan style. Slight changes had been made in the lower architecture, for the windows opened on to a broad terrace which led by steps to the lawns.

The house was empty. This charming place was at anyone's disposal who chose to hire it.

"It is the very place for us," said H. Minor. "Do take it. Then we can come over every Wednesday and every Saturday; we should see so much more of each other, and you would never have the bother of coming all the way from town."

"And think of the lovely Heavy Teas you could give us," said H. Major in his largest capitals; "the Unlimited Strawberries and Cream we should come in for. Let us moor the boat and land and look over the house. I daresay there is a caretaker somewhere about."

The proposal was no sooner made than carried out. The boat was moored to the side: surely Pan was in those reeds playing upon his pipe, though we heard him not; the place, the hour, and the occasion were altogether so perfect: and we landed upon the green-sward.

"I feel as if we were trespassing," said H. Major. "We have no order to view. These caretakers are always so mighty particular about their 'orders.'"

"Our appearance is quite sufficient," returned H. Minor magnificently; "and," turning to their humble servant, "no one would ever dare deny you anything."

We accepted the compliment with a wise shake of the head, which might be interpreted any way, like some famous Parliamentary speeches of modern times. We all stood a moment gazing at the house. It was certainly very charming and picturesque. Judged outwardly, nothing seemed wanting to make it the perfection of a residence. We really began to entertain H. Minor's proposal.

As we looked, suddenly a form appeared at one of the lower windows. It was the form of a man, dressed in a shabby suit of mourning. He looked old, and his white hair was worn long; but though old, he was hale and vigorous, and on his face was a fine fresh colour, rather unusual in one of his age. He gazed at us for

a moment : then, apparently satisfied with his scrutiny, threw open the casement, and made a sign which seemed to bid us advance. We noticed that the left hand was kept pressed over his heart, almost as if in pain.

We drew near to the house, and he made way for us to enter. We did so. The room was large and lofty ; a room of fine dimensions. It might have been a drawing-room or a ball-room.

"It appears to be a charming house," I said, by way of breaking the silence. "We should much like to go over it, if it is not putting you to trouble."

For our entertainer seemed quite above the ordinary level of caretakers. He was dignified, and there was a repose of manner about him that suggested a man of education and refinement : a gentleman, in fact. Altogether it seemed rather mysterious. Who could he be ?

As we entered he had withdrawn to a little distance—an action we had put down to deference, though it was unnecessary ; and he never approached nearer to us than a distance of about four yards. No matter how we endeavoured to approach him, we never succeeded in doing so. We spoke to him, but he never replied ; took no notice of our question, even when it was repeated in another form.

"Poor fellow ! He is evidently deaf and dumb," said H. Major. "How strange to have a deaf and dumb caretaker. How does he manage to hear the bells when people come ?"

"Probably has a wife in the lower regions," returned H. Minor. "A deaf and dumb man couldn't live alone in an empty house. Just fancy what a melancholy life he would have of it !"

But our guide seemed to know our desire by instinct, for he conducted us through room after room, upstairs and downstairs, every door being open. Our footsteps echoed through halls and corridors ; his we noticed made no sound.

"Deaf people often talk in low tones," said H. Major, presently ; "evidently they also tread lightly. He must have india-rubber soles to his boots. I wish they would put india-rubber round the clapper of the bell that wakes us in the morning."

"And so be late for chapel," returned H. Minor, "and have extra school if you got caught. I don't think there would be any pull in that."

We were in an upper room when this interesting fragment of conversation took place, looking out upon the drive. Suddenly, as we looked, we noticed a carriage sweep round, and come rapidly up to the door. It was an old-fashioned chariot, high, with a C-spring. The coachman wore a wig with a pigtail ; a footman standing up behind also wore a pigtail. The horses pranced along, and it drew up at the front door ; but without noise.

"How singular !" cried H. Minor. "These windows must be double, or hermetically sealed. I can't hear a sound. And what a

creepy feeling there is in the atmosphere ! I declare I believe the place is haunted. And what an old-fashioned turn-out ! It ought to be in Madame Tussaud's room of antiquities. It would just match some of the old frights there."

The footman with the pigtail got down quickly, put down the steps of the carriage, opened the door as if to admit someone ; closed it again, mounted to his place behind, and the carriage drove off. We had seen no one get in or get out.

I began to think it very strange, and turned to try and get some sort of explanation of our guide. He had disappeared, and we were alone. Supposing that he had merely gone downstairs, we went down also, and made our way into the room we had first entered.

At this moment a door banged loudly in the house ; too heavily for anything but the front door ; and we heard very human footsteps advancing. Next moment a woman appeared and gazed at us in undisguised astonishment. She was a little woman with a red face, and round, black, beady eyes, and was dressed in a red and black plaid shawl. Like most little women, she was self-asserting.

"Gentlemen, how did you get in?" she cried. "Who opened that window? I left every window closed and bolted, when I went out on an errand an hour ago."

"I suppose it was your husband," we replied, though we certainly thought them a very ill-matched couple ; the woman little better than an ordinary servant ; the other apparently a man of refinement and a gentleman.

"Husband?" she asked. "I'll thank you, sir, not to take away my character. I've no husband, and have had nothing to do with the perfidious sect since I was basely jilted by a corporal in the 10th Lancers thirty-four years ago come Michaelmas. No man has been inside these doors, sir, since I became caretaker here six months ago. No, nor never shall. I was born Martha Muggins, and Martha Muggins I hope to die."

"We can assure you," we replied, "that the window was opened and we have been shown through the house by an old gentleman with white hair, and dressed in black. We think he must be deaf and dumb, for he never spoke, and never answered any of our remarks. He has disappeared, but must be about the house somewhere."

Whilst we spoke the woman backed against the wall in evident terror ; her face blanched, her little black eyes grew round with horror.

"Mercy be good to us!" she cried. "It must be the ghost I've heard talk of. It's said the house is haunted, but I have never seen nothing, and I didn't believe it."

"Woman," we rebuked, a strange sensation nevertheless taking possession of us, "there are no such things as ghosts ; what we have seen must be real flesh and blood. There is no doubt a man in the house, and you will probably find him in your kitchen setting out the tea-things and toasting your muffins."

"I declare to goodness ——" began the woman, then broke off abruptly. "Come this way, gentlemen, and see for yourselves."

Martha Muggins—to give her her name—led the way to the kitchen and we followed. It was on a level with the drawing-room. The kitchen was empty. A small fire burnt in the grate, the kettle sang on the hob, a cat was stretched out at full length on the hearth ; but there was no trace of human being.

"There !" cried the woman triumphantly. "And you may search from roof to cellar, and never a man will you find on the premises. Martha Muggins I was born, Martha Muggins I'll ——"

"But whose was that carriage," we interrupted, more and more puzzled ; "an old-fashioned chariot that drew up to the front door just before you came in, and drove off again without anyone getting in or out ? We certainly thought it very curious."

"Carriage, sir ? Carriage ? Why it must be part of the ghost performance. No carriage could have got in. The gates are closed and locked, and there lies the key upon the dresser, where it has been for the last three days. Come and see."

Again we followed. We all filed out and down the walk, and proceeded to the gates, which could not be seen from the house for a large amount of shrubbery which stood in the way. The large iron gates were certainly closed and locked. A smaller gate at the side was open, but no carriage could have passed through it. We knew not what to say.

"What is the story you have heard ?" we asked at length. "You tell us the place is said to be haunted ?"

"The story runs this way, sir," replied the woman, shivering in the broad sunshine. "It's said that more than a hundred years ago a murder was committed here on the 18th of June ——"

"The 18th of June," we interrupted ; "why, this is the 18th of June !"

"Mercy be good to us !" cried the woman once more. "I'd no idea of the date. That accounts for it. Every year since the murder, it's said that the murdered man appears : an old gentleman with longish white hair and ordinary black clothes ; no knee breeches, no buckles, no nothing fine or antique. It's said that on the 18th of June, more than a hundred years ago, a lady drove up in her carriage, entered the house, stabbed him to the heart, and drove off again."

"And what became of her ?" we asked, wondering whether we were awake or dreaming.

"When she reached her home, it's said she was found dead in her carriage—poisoned by her own hand."

"What is the name of the place ?" we asked, thinking this the strangest afternoon we had ever spent.

"It's called Clare Manor, sir. Originally belonged to the St. Clares, who have all died out. But they dropped the St. before that

happened, and only called themselves Clare. And a good thing too, for there must have been more sinners than saints amongst them."

"How long has Clare Manor been to be let?"

"Nearly a year, sir, and it won't be let in a hurry if it's haunted. I've been here just six months. And now what am I to do? I have never believed in the ghost, but they say seeing's believing. I can't stay as caretaker in a haunted house."

"Perhaps," we suggested, "if it only appears once a year, it is all over for the present, and you may be free from further intrusion for at least twelve months."

The woman shivered. "I don't know," she murmured. "Men are perfidious creatures; that lancer corporal was the worst of his sect, and I've never believed in one of them since; but I'd rather have to do with a dozen men than one ghost. I must consult my niece when she comes in. The carriage, sir? That carriage came for the ghost. It's said to come every year, and the old gentleman goes off in it."

Time was passing; the afternoon shadows were beginning to lengthen; we had still a long row before reaching Guildford. We made our way round to our boat, the woman escorting us, possibly "for company." As we shot out into the stream a slight scream arrested us.

"The Order! the Order!" cried the woman excitedly. "You haven't given me the ORDER."

"You must ask the ghost for it," returned H. Minor, "the 18th of next June. And please give our compliments and thanks to the old gentleman for his polite attentions to us to-day."

And the last we saw of Martha Muggins as the boat shot round a bend of the river she was wringing her hands in despair, evidently quite as much "upset in her mind" at the loss of the order as at the appearance of the ghost.

Our row back was a very silent one. I knew not what to think. The whole experience had been strange, inexplicable, full of mystery. What did it all mean? In vain we revolved the question in our mind. If we had been alone we might have supposed that we had fallen asleep and dreamed it; but we were not alone, and it was no dream. We thought over the matter that night, we have thought of it often since, and we have come to no conclusion in the matter. Or rather, can we come to any other than one conclusion? This strange experience, must it not actually have been an appearance from the world of spirits, which, ever since the foundation of the world, in all ages, have been said occasionally to come back to the scenes of their earthly haunts. "All reason may be against it," said Dr. Johnson, "but the weight of evidence is all in its favour; and you cannot set aside such an array of witnesses."

We landed that afternoon rather more silently than was our usual order of proceeding.

"Hope you enjoyed the row, sir? Nothing happened?" said the boatman, noticing probably our subdued air.

"Charming day; the very day for a row," we replied, ambiguously, and went our way.

"On the whole, I don't think I would take that house," said H. Major, thoughtfully, as we went up the hill towards the White Hart.

"But what about the Wednesdays and Saturdays, and the Heavy Teas, and the Unlimited Strawberries and Cream?"

"Oh, well," contemplatively, "it would be hard lines—it would be too bad to be disappointed of *that*; you must come down as often as you possibly can, and we must make the best of the White Hart resources. But, after all, you know, *you're* what we care about; not the strawberries and cream. Not but what they are lovely accessories."

A very pretty speech, which, of course, made me more abjectly their slave than ever.

It was some consolation to find that their fine appetites were in no way affected by our late experience, wild and mysterious though it had been; they did full justice to the good things provided by the White Hart: and later on we parted as usual at the railway station, their train steaming on towards Godalming, ours towards London. And as we took our solitary journey, and pondered over the strange, incomprehensible events of the afternoon, we could only repeat the oft-quoted words of the Prince of Denmark: "There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy."



SONNET.

SWEET sleep! ah far more dear art thou to me
Than all my waking hours, for when thy hand
Leads me within the dim mysterious land,
Her spirit, like my own, released by thee,
Awaits me there, and once again I see,
In the dream light, the dear-loved smile of old;
And cherished memories of the past unfold
Their hidden leaves to sunshine, breeze and bee;
And once again her hand in mine I take,
And wander where the woodlands thrill with birds;
Or pause beside the sleeping, moonlit lake,
In silent ecstasy too deep for words.
Sweet sleep! what wonder if to thee I give
My praise, for when I wake I cease to live.

SYDNEY HODGES.

THREE FAMILY STORIES.

BY THE REV. F. O. W.

THE following stories need but little introduction. I declare them to be absolutely authentic. The persons mentioned in them have been dead many years, and were members of my mother's family. As a boy I frequently heard my mother relate them, and when a young man at Cambridge, and on a visit to a fellow collegian at M. in D—shire in the Christmas of 1850, I met two old ladies, each over seventy, and cousins (once removed) of my mother—Miss Mary Elwood, and her sister, Mrs. Wolfe (born Kate Elwood). They kindly asked me to tea (and muffins—to which I am partial), and I went, and made myself, I believe, very agreeable. From them I heard again the stories I had heard before from my mother. They had been eye-witnesses of the incidents I have written down, and I write them just as I heard them. I neither add to the facts nor take from them. I do not pretend to explain or to understand them; I only know that they happened. Mrs. Wolfe related to me the first of the three, and her sister, Miss Mary Elwood (my mother's name was Elwood), the other two.

THE RED ROOM.

(Narrated by Mrs. Wolfe.)

ABOUT the year 1795 myself, then a girl of eighteen, and my elder sister, Mary, lived with our brother John at his Vicarage of Chalk in the county of D—. The patron of it was Sir Herbert Palmer, an old college friend of my brother, who resided at Chalk Priory, and was one of the chief men in the county.

Sir Herbert was married, but had no children, and his wife's youngest sister, Constance Moore, a beautiful girl of my own age, lived with them as their adopted daughter, so to say. We were very intimate, more like sisters than anything else, and I have often thought that my brother John, who was then about six-and-twenty, was in love with her. But of course such a thing as marriage was not to be thought of. Constance, as was to be expected, had many admirers, and at last she wrote to us to say that she was engaged to a very rich gentleman who lived in London, asking us at the same time to be her bridesmaids. Of course we were only too glad to be.

And this brings me to the evening before the wedding-day.

We had been invited to sleep at the Priory, because it was close to the church, whereas the Vicarage was quite a mile and a half distant. There had been a large ball that night; my brother was there, but he did not dance or play cards, and I thought he seemed

ill and out of spirits. About twelve o'clock we wished him good-night, and went to our bed-room.

It was called the Red Room from the colour of the paper on the walls and the crimson curtains of the huge mahogany four-post bedstead, which, with its piled-up mattress and feather bed, was so high that it required, and had, a little step wherewith to mount to the top. The room, however, looked very cheerful with its lighted candles and the blazing fire that cast its ruddy glow into the farthest corners of the otherwise sombre apartment.

Lady Palmer's own maid had been sent by her mistress to wait upon us, but we dispensed with her services, for we wished to be alone to talk over the incidents of the evening, and the great event that was coming off next day. So we sent her away, and, locking the door upon her that we might not be interrupted, got ready for bed; then, sitting down in two comfortable arm-chairs before the fire, indulged ourselves in talk such as was to be expected from two high-spirited, somewhat giddy and extremely happy girls.

All at once the Priory clock boomed forth the hour.

"Kate!" exclaimed my sister, "there's one o'clock, I declare. Let us get to bed, or we shall never be up in the morning. What's *that?*" she immediately added.

"What?" I asked.

"Why, that noise by the door!"

Our room, I must tell you, was made up of two apartments thrown into one, but only half of the wall had been taken down, its place being supplied by a curtain of some thick material, so that the door could not be seen from where we sat.

I listened, and looked in the direction of the door. There certainly was a sound, something between a sob and a sigh; and with that sound another seemed to be mingled, like a smothered tread of someone walking gently across the carpet so as to avoid being heard.

"Look, Kate! Look at the curtain! It moves!" exclaimed my sister in great agitation.

I looked at the curtain. It presented the appearance of the sail of a ship filled by a sudden breeze.

"It's only the wind under the door," I said, affecting a courage I by no means felt. "Come, get into bed at once," and I set her the example, passing by the curtain, and getting on the stool near that I might do so.

I gave the curtain one hurried, careful glance. It seemed to move as though a hand behind it was about to draw it back. I sprang into bed, expecting my sister to follow me; but she did not. We were both cowards, but she was a greater coward than I. Yet sometimes the most timid are impelled by their very alarm to rush at danger as if under some awful fascination. I saw my sister walk up to the curtain, draw it aside, and go behind it.

She did not reappear—not then, at least. I called her, but she did not answer. Then the curtain was drawn back, but gently, as though parted by the wind blowing through the open door, and a face looked out upon me from between the folds. Then the curtain parted more, and a figure appeared. It was not my sister Mary, but a pale face, with glassy, staring eyes of one dressed in a shroud.

I swooned away : how long I remained unconscious I cannot tell. I was aroused by feeling the counterpane being dragged, as though someone were trying to remove it.

I looked around, hardly daring to do so for fear of what might meet my gaze ; but it was only my sister that I saw, though, for a moment, dressed in her nightgown as she was, and with a face as pale as that of a corpse, I fancied it was the Being I had seen before. Poor Mary was at the foot of the bed, making frantic but vain endeavours to get into it. For a few moments I could do nothing but watch her. At last, when she approached the side where I lay, I gave her my hand, and with my help and her own efforts she succeeded. We put our arms round each other's necks, as though for mutual protection, and so remained for a long while—all night, it seemed—without speaking a word. We dared not.

At last my sister spoke ; but it was in a whisper so faint that I could hardly hear her.

“Did you see anything, sister Kate ?” she asked.

I don't think a voice could sink to a fainter whisper than mine did when at last I replied : “Yes ; I saw brother John, dressed in his grave-clothes, looking at me from the curtain.”

“I saw him too. He wanted me to follow him, but I wouldn't. And he's there still—behind the curtain.”

She shuddered as she spoke with a convulsion that made her tremble from head to foot. We spoke no more, until a hurried knocking at the door roused us from a fitful kind of slumber into which we had fallen.

I got up—my sister dared not, even then—and moved towards the curtain. I think I never have felt such repugnance at anything as I did at drawing back that curtain. The daylight entering the room only through the crevices of the shutters, and even then to a great degree excluded by the curtains drawn before the windows, imparted a strange and ghostly effect to the surrounding objects.

But repeated knocks at the door determined me ; and tearing aside the thick curtain, I unlocked the door and admitted Lady Palmer, who was in tears and much agitation.

I saw at once that she was the bearer of bad news. I knew what it was before she opened her lips, and surprised her very much by telling her so. My brother John was dead ; I was sure of it ; and I was right. Going home in the dark, he had missed the way, and falling into the river that flowed through the park, had been drowned. I have his watch now ; it has never been touched or wound-up since

it was taken from his body: *it had stopped at a few minutes to one*, and so records the exact time of his fatal immersion.

Of course this caused a delay to the wedding; a very fortunate circumstance for Constance Moore; for soon afterwards the gentleman she would otherwise have married was discovered to be such a thoroughly worthless character that the engagement was ended at once. She afterwards married a very different person, and was as happy as such a nice girl deserved to be.

A STRANGE DREAM.

(Narrated by Miss Mary Elwood.)

At the close of last century the Reverend James Elwood Bullen held the Vicarage of St. James's, Cheltington, one of our most fashionable inland watering places: he was also a magistrate, and very rich, and was much looked up to by the good folk of the city where he lived. On his mother's side he was my first cousin; and, at the time of which I am speaking, was a widower with two daughters, Gertrude and Mabel, of whom the former was engaged to a Captain Rice, of the East India Company's service.

As in the story which my sister, Mrs. Wolfe, has told you the remarkable affair happened immediately before a wedding, so it was in the one I am about to relate.

Paragon House, Mr. Bullen's residence, was filled with guests, amongst whom were several of Gertrude Bullen's schoolfellows, whom she had promised to ask to her wedding; so here they now were, blooming and beautiful as a bunch of roses.

Amongst these was one they called Biddy, though her real name was Jane—Jane Johnson. She was a pale-faced, dark-eyed girl, rather absent in her manner and sulky in her temper; but she had a gift—it ran in her family, she told us—of dreaming dreams that came true.

One night, for instance (so Gertrude Bullen told me), Biddy dreamed that she saw a skeleton walk into the dormitory at school where she slept, and stopping at the foot of the bed next to her own, turned the sheet down, and lay side by side with poor little Polly Jones, putting its bony arms round the child's small neck. And within a fortnight poor Polly lay in her coffin, dead of scarlet fever.

On the morning before the wedding-day, the breakfast-table at Paragon House was crowded with a party unusually gay and lively: Miss Johnson was the last to appear.

Mr. Bullen did not approve of elders being kept waiting even by young ladies, so it was somewhat reprovngly that he greeted her.

"I hope you slept well last night, Miss Johnson," he said.

"Yes, sir, thank you," she replied; "at least, pretty well; only—" and here she stopped.

"Only what?" demanded more than one questioner.

"Well, I had a dream, if you must know," she said rather reluctantly, yet a little proud of her gift too, I thought.

"Oh, don't tell us your horrid dreams, please," protested little Hettie Bellairs, really frightened, though she spoke laughingly. She had been poor Polly Jones's bosom friend, five years ago.

"I hope you haven't been dreaming about me, Biddy," said one girl rather mockingly.

"Or me, either," said another in the same way.

"Or me," chorused her school companions.

"It isn't likely," she retorted, rather contemptuously. "I don't think enough about you to dream of you much; but I *did* dream of you a little, all the same."

"Did you? Won't you tell us?" said the first of the girls who had spoken, and whose name, by-the-by, was Carruthers.

"No, I won't," she said bluntly.

"Keep your rubbishing dreams to yourself, then," was the reply, so rudely made that Miss Johnson's dark face was lit up with anger.

"Hush! young ladies; let us have no quarrelling," said a gentleman who sat next to Mr. Bullen. He was his cousin, and, like him, a clergyman, being the Rev. Simon Elwood, only surviving son of old John Elwood. He was a short, thick-set man, with little legs, but of an aspect so stern and commanding that anyone but a fool would think twice before he meddled with him; with his tongue, at least. He had an ungovernable temper when anything roused him, and it didn't take much to do that. He had come to Cheltington to perform the marriage ceremony.

As he spoke the young ladies ceased to wrangle, and left the subject that had caused the altercation; but when they got together by themselves their talk went quickly back to Miss Johnson's dream.

The girls began by an examination—the fiftieth or so—of the dresses they were to wear on the following day. Now Miss Johnson was poor; so poor that she could not afford a new dress, but had had her best one surreptitiously turned by a Cheltington milliner, and was hourly expecting it. Gertrude Bullen, however, was in the secret, and I am afraid had confided it to Maria Carruthers, her bosom friend, the girl with whom Miss Johnson had had the short but angry discussion.

"Has your dress come home yet, Biddy?" inquired Miss Carruthers, with a very wise look.

"Hush, Molly," whispered Gertrude Bullen, with a manner of conscious guilt.

Miss Johnson looked at them both and perfectly understood what had happened.

"No, it hasn't," she said; "and, what's more, I don't care if it doesn't come, for it won't be wanted."

"Won't be wanted!" I could not help exclaiming. "What do you mean? Are you not going to the wedding to-morrow?"

"No; nor are any of you. There will be no wedding; and Gertrude Bullen will die an old maid."

Having delivered herself of these remarks, Miss Johnson sat down in a manner utterly defiant of the company, and listened quite unmoved to the retorts of her young companions.

"Oh, indeed," began Maria Carruthers, "so that's your precious dream, is it? And what else did you dream, pray? Perhaps as Captain Rice isn't going to marry Gertrude, he has fallen in love with you?"

"No, he hasn't, and I would not have him if he had," retorted Miss Johnson angrily. "But Mr. Bullen will turn him out of the house, and that old crosspatch parson Elwood as well, and will never speak to either of them again. Yes, that's my dream. You wanted to know it, and now you've heard it I hope you like it."

Having finished her remarks, she walked out of the room, leaving her school-companions in a state of consternation not to be described.

It was four o'clock p.m., dinner was over at Paragon House, and the ladies, having had their customary glass of port, had just left for the drawing-room, when the handle of the dining-room door was turned and Mabel Bullen, a girl of seventeen, entered.

Now there was a long-established custom at Cheltington—and elsewhere, very likely—that a gentleman might, if he chose, claim a kiss from a young lady if she came back to the dining-room.

Amongst the guests there that afternoon was a young gentleman who had known Mabel Bullen from childhood, and had grown to be very fond of her. His name was Harry Topham; he was articled to one of the chief solicitors in Cheltington, was as handsome and gentlemanly a young fellow of nineteen as you could wish to see, and Mabel Bullen was as fond of him as he was of her. They had sat next each other at dinner, and had been so engrossed in one another's company that they had not noticed Mr. Bullen's obvious displeasure. For, for the first time, his parental eyes were opened to the fact that this penniless young man had had the audacity to fall in love with his daughter, and not only that, but to show it also.

Therefore, when he saw her come back, and, going up to Harry's chair, address him in a whisper, he looked as black as a thunder-cloud. But Harry looked and felt delighted: for he had secreted her pocket-handkerchief in the hope that, missing it, she would return for it and so he might claim the penalty. And perhaps for the same reason she had allowed it to be purloined.

"I want my handkerchief, Harry," she said. "I must have dropped it under my chair."

"Yes, you did: I found it, and put it in my pocket," he said, with a bright look shining in his eyes.

"Give it me, please," she said.

"Certainly," he replied as he produced it ; "but I must have the forfeit, you know."

She laughed and blushed, but she didn't resist, unless by saying "what nonsense" is resisting : so he was proceeding to take it when the loud, angry voice of Mr. Bullen stopped him.

"For shame, Mr. Topham ! I won't allow it ; give the girl her handkerchief and let her be off," he exclaimed.

"But, sir——" pleaded Harry, loath to lose his kiss.

"Hold your tongue, sir," vociferated Mr. Bullen. "And as for you, Mabel, if you don't do as I tell you, I'll send you to bed this instant, and turn the key on you."

As he spoke he brought his fist down on the table with such force that it caused the poor girl to rush from the room at once. But it did more than that, for it upset a portion of Mr. Simon Elwood's port wine over his coat sleeve and ruffles, and thereby somewhat roused his temper. Now when cousin Simon was angry he could speak in a very offensive way, and the simplest expletives became, as they fell from his lips, very exasperating.

"Pish !" he exclaimed, irritably, as he wiped the wine from his coat with his napkin.

"What do you mean by 'pish,' cousin Simon ?" demanded Mr. Bullen.

"Pish—h—h !" ejaculated Mr. Elwood, more contemptuously, if possible, than before.

"Did you 'pish' at me, cousin Elwood ?" asked Mr. Bullen.

"Pshaw ! what's the harm of a boy kissing a girl he's known since he was in frocks, and has kissed a score of times before, I'll be bound," exclaimed cousin Simon.

"Really, Elwood, I don't want to quarrel with you, and in my own house too ; but I cannot allow such indecent talk as this, and I must beg you to stop it," said Mr. Bullen, in a loud voice, and in a very dictatorial manner, neither of which could Mr. Elwood easily brook.

"Indecent talk, Bullen !" cousin Elwood flamed out ; "it's only a man of nasty ideas who could see anything improper in a boy kissing a girl under these circumstances. The custom is as old as Cheltington, and you've practised it a score of times yourself, I've no doubt. You've made a mountain out of a molehill, as you usually do ; so now let's change the subject, and drink the health of the bride and bridegroom."

But Mr. Bullen was not to be so put down.

"Call me a man of nasty ideas !" he raved. "Me, a clergyman, a magistrate, and the father of grown-up daughters, because I don't choose to have a whipper-snapper of a lawyer's clerk make love to my daughter before my face ! It's a good thing I'm a clergyman and a magistrate, or I'd soon show him, and you too, for the matter of that, that I'm not the man to be insulted in my own house with impunity."

"Keep your temper, Bullen, or you'll be saying what you'll be sorry for," said Mr. Elwood, with forced calmness; but within he was of a white heat with rage. The other subsided into a tone and manner of fierce banter.

"You tell me to keep my temper! That's a good joke, if ever there was one. I wish that poor meek wife of yours was in the room to hear you say it, and those unfortunate children, who daren't call their lives their own when you're in the house, and are never happy but when your back is turned. You ask me to keep my temper, do you? Don't talk of temper to me, I beg."

Mr. Elwood's complexion now became of an ashen grey tint, and his large, well-shaped nose trembled ominously of a coming outbreak.

"You've had too much wine, Mr. Bullen," he said, "and you don't know what you're saying; but as I don't want to be insulted any more, I'll beg leave to go to my hotel. You can send me your apology when you've come to your senses, and I shall be willing to receive it, and overlook what you have said."

Mr. Elwood rose as he spoke, and moved towards the door. Mr. Bullen replied by ringing the bell furiously.

"Atkins," he said, as soon as the butler entered, "show Mr. Elwood into the street, and if he calls again don't let him in. If you do, you leave my service; remember that."

"Sir!" cried Mr. Simon Elwood in a tone now hoarse with rage, "you have grossly, wantonly insulted me. You need not fear my coming here, for I will never, knowingly, speak to or see you again as long as I live."

He then walked into the hall, opened the front door for himself, and went into the street, and in the silence that fell upon the company, his retreating footsteps were heard till they died away in the distance. As may readily be supposed, all the guests felt extremely uncomfortable, some of them, too, not a little indignant with their host. Among these was Captain Rice, and he felt rather angry with himself, too, for not having interfered, by so much as a word, when Mr. Elwood was, so to say, turned out of the house. It seemed as if he had been showing the white feather, and being displeased with himself, he naturally felt angry with other people, especially with Mr. Bullen. Mr. Bullen noticing it and divining the cause, felt angry with him. Now, when two people feel angry with each other a little matter will precipitate a quarrel.

"Well, Rice?" he said in a tone as of challenge.

"Well, sir?" retorted Captain Rice, looking up defiantly, as the other thought.

"That's not a very civil answer, I think, especially for a military man," remarked Mr. Bullen.

"It's as civil an answer as yours was a question," retorted the Captain.

"You forget to whom you are talking, I think, Captain Rice."

"I am not the only person who has done that this evening, sir."

"Ha! I see; you're backing up that fellow in his impudence, are you? Take care, Captain Rice; you'll repent it."

"I know what I mean, Mr. Bullen, and I am not afraid to say it, either," was the calm rejoinder. "You used language to Mr. Elwood just now which you should not have done, and which I, as a gentleman and an officer, should not have listened to without at least a protest."

"Have you finished your remarks?" interrupted Mr. Bullen, with mock politeness.

"Nearly. I only wish to add that I am going now to offer my apologies to Mr. Elwood for the treatment he has received in this house." Having finished, he rose to leave the room.

"Don't trouble yourself to return, Captain Rice; I shall not expect you," said Mr. Bullen, enigmatically.

"I don't understand," faltered the poor Captain, unwilling to believe what the other meant.

Mr. Bullen vouchsafed no immediate reply. He walked to a bureau, whence he produced a bulky document tied round with red tape. It was a marriage settlement deed, by which Captain Rice would become the possessor of ten thousand pounds. There was no need to tell the Captain what it was, for he had seen it and signed it only that afternoon.

"Leave this room now, as you propose," said Mr. Bullen, speaking in his most magisterial manner; "pay the visit you have spoken of, and the moment you cross the threshold of that door, I throw this document into the fire; if, after that, my daughter chooses to marry you, it will be without a penny and with her father's curse. Now, go or stay, as you like."

Captain Rice looked at his intended father-in-law steadfastly, but with withering contempt. Then he turned on his heel and walked out into the hall, and from thence into the street. At the same moment that he was putting on his hat, Mr. Bullen was thrusting the parchment into the fire, where he stirred it up with the poker till every fragment was consumed.

You may guess the sequel. Gertrude Bullen never married Captain Rice; in fact, she never married anyone; but her sister Mabel did, and she and her husband, who of course was Harry Topham, made a home for her. Never forgetting how, though all unwillingly, they had shipwrecked the happiness of her life, they strove to recompense her by the most tender affection and care. She was very happy in their love, and in that of their children too; and still more in the good works to which she gave herself; among which must be reckoned what she did for poor Biddy, who made an unfortunate marriage, and was left with a sick husband and a large family of children. They would all have starved, or gone to the work-

house, but for Gertrude Bullen. As it was, they were helped in every way, and all of poor Biddy's children that are now living are doing well ; and dear Gertrude Bullen found a source of happiness in their prosperity and grateful devotion which never failed as long as she lived.

THE MYSTERIOUS HORSEMAN

(*Narrated by Miss Mary Elwood.*)

My uncle, John Elwood, though only a linendraper, came of an old Oxfordshire family, and his coat of arms may be seen in Dr. Plot's history of that county. Though, to say, only a tradesman, he was a man of such unimpeachable integrity and high principles, on which he invariably acted, that he was regarded, not only with respect, but with honour. People forgot the shop, and thought only of the man and his lineage. He carried on his business in the High Street, Oxford, and you would be surprised if I were to speak to you of the great people who would come and join in his early dinner in his little parlour. A frequent guest there was Lord North, the great Prime Minister, who would sit with his blue ribbon of the Garter, and drink his bottle of port with my uncle as though they were equals. But all this is by the way. My uncle's parlour opened right into the street, with which it communicated by a door and a flight of stone steps. The upper portion of the door was glass, so that, sitting in the parlour, or hall (whichever you like to term it), you could see what passed in the street outside. The family took their meals there, and treated it as a sitting-room in every respect.

My uncle's family consisted of two sons and two daughters. Simon, the eldest son, was then an undergraduate at T—— College ; James, or Jim, as he was called, was at sea in a West India merchantman. The two daughters, Lucy and Eliza, were both at home ; being unmarried, they kept their father's house ; and I was on a visit at the time when the incident occurred of which I am going to tell you.

James Elwood was his father's favourite, but he was a sad scapegrace in all sorts of ways, and had all the vices common to sailors of that period, including, I am sorry to say, a decided love for strong liquor ; so that even his father thought that the less he was at home the better. But like most sailors that I have known, he was very honest and honourable ; of a generous disposition, always ready to lend or give as he might be asked. He never said "No" when he could say "Yes." Unlike the Elwoods, he was very handsome ; tall and erect, as nimble as a stag, with the grand look of an old cavalier. Cousin James had, at the time of my visit, been absent three years ; and, for all that was known of him, he might be away three more. It was towards the end of autumn that I paid my visit, and on the third or fourth day after my arrival we were all sitting in the parlour over our tea, about four o'clock in the afternoon, when we were appalled—I

can use no weaker word—by a sudden darkness that seemed to descend upon us in a moment. Then there followed a loud crash of thunder right overhead, and a bursting sound, or roar, such as I have never heard in all my life.

"It's the Day of Judgment come at last!" exclaimed Uncle Elwood in awe-struck tones, as he rushed to the window and looked out upon the street. We all followed him, believing what he said was true; at least I did, I know. I quite expected as I rushed to the window to see the dead people from the neighbouring graveyard walking up and down the High Street in their shrouds. As I approached the window, I heard them quite plainly, or seemed to do so; and by the sound, a mighty concourse filled the street. Yet it was only the rain! How it did come down! To say one would have got wet through in a moment is to say little or nothing.

No human being could have stood up under it. It descended like a solid sheet of water, and as it fell it seemed to roar and hiss in its impatience to reach the ground. The noise it made was so great we could not hear ourselves speak. It was an awful moment, and I suppose prepared me for the sight I afterwards most clearly beheld. While we were looking out, the rain ceased *for* a moment and *in* a moment: the effect of the sudden and complete silence was awful in the extreme. I quite expected it to be the prelude of the Judgment, and listened, I assure you I did, quite believing that the Lord Jesus would immediately appear. And then there came a clap of thunder that seemed to split the house from top to bottom followed in an instant by a flash of lightning that lit up the entire street, and then the rain descended as before.

But I had no eyes for the storm just then. My attention was entirely absorbed by the figure of a man on horseback who seemed to spring out of the flash of lightning. He rode at full gallop down the street, but I did not hear the sound of his horse's hoofs. Either I was not listening or the surrounding noises drowned it. His face was covered, and he was dashing down the street at his utmost speed, with an obvious desire of getting out of the storm as soon as possible.

We all gathered at the door to see him pass. As he neared the house he turned his bridle, and rode so close up to the door that the nose of the horse seemed to press against the glass. I noticed with surprise that neither man nor steed bore any trace of the drenching storm, but were perfectly dry. As he reached us the horseman uncovered his face and, to our amazement, we recognised cousin James Elwood. But he looked pale and ghastly, as though the storm had scared him. Before we could speak to him or open the door, he was gone, and dashing away again, had turned the corner of the street.

We all saw him and knew him; we expected him to return all that evening, but he never came.

The following day we heard that the ship in which he had been second mate—the *Alnwick Castle*—had floated into Bristol Dock, but without a soul on board. A storm had overtaken them entering the Channel ; and the crew, together with the captain and officers, including poor Jim, had taken to the boats. They had been hailed by a passing vessel that sailed close to them, but they were all drunk, and refused to take any notice. The boats were picked up, but none of the bodies of the crew were ever seen again. So far as could be made out, cousin Jim Elwood must have been drowned at the very time when the mysterious horseman rode up to the front door of Mr. Elwood's house.

Old Mr. Elwood never recovered from the shock of his son's death and his terrible end. Mr. Simon Elwood, years afterwards, could never speak, without shaking all over, of his brother's face as he saw it that afternoon. He always held to the belief that it was his spirit compelled to come as a warning to his family. In this opinion he never wavered, though he lived to be four-score. For my part I don't know what he came for, but I know that I saw him just as I have told you, and that I shall never forget his face as long as I live ; no more would you if you had seen it as I did. I am an old woman, and don't understand things as the young people nowadays seem to do, but I am content to wait, and it won't be long now.



“DOMINI VOLUNTAS FIAT.”

'Twas winter, and the wild wind swept
About the home that she was leaving ;
Dear child, she knew not we were grieving,
As to the Father's arms she crept.

We could not hear the whisper'd call,
Or feel the loving touch and tender ;
But more, far more than words can render,
Our darling realised it all.

We watch'd her till she fell asleep,
The sleep which knows on earth no waking ;
God took our treasure. He is taking
Good care of all we could not keep.

THE HARVEST OF THE HEDGEROWS.

THE beauties of the English hedgerows have often been celebrated, and nothing is more attractive to us than the byeways and hedgerows of our district. You can wander for miles across fields and by hedges, now and then skirting a little brook, garrulous in babble and bright in reflection of sky and near surroundings; mounting over steps instead of turnstiles, in absolute solitude, though you are not far from one of the most frequented high-roads in the kingdom.

A few steps off it in a right-of-way, and you are in a region of unbroken quiet, save for the caw-caw of the rook, or the goo-goo-gooing of the wild pigeon, or the whirr of the partridge that has been making too free with the grain and the field-peas and beans that are in parts yet lying out in the fields, and they are off at your near approach.

The other day, with my favourite dog, I wandered by these foot-paths in one direction for a mile-and-a-half or more. The fields were now almost cleared of oats and wheat; only a little barley and beans or peas lay here and there, and all bore a very autumn-like appearance. At a favourite leafy corner of mine, I sat down almost embowered in greenery, with my feet in a dry ditch, and above me a canopy of hazels, wild bullaces, oaks, sloes and alders, with other growths, so closely intertwined that from a very little distance you would have found it hard to distinguish them.

The birds were busy, now and then breaking into a little burst of song; and a blue-tit, like a bit of blue sky, flew close past me, while the field cricket kept up a monotonous chirping; a little field-mouse, disturbed somehow by my settlement, ran up the bottom of the ditch, and engaged the attention of my dog, which at once was after it, and relieved me of his immediate presence; for he thought it game big enough to scrape after where it had disappeared from his view, and persevered in this work for a long time: presenting a parable of the life of many men, who hunt after worthless game that can never really be enjoyed; and unless they are philosophers enough to reach the conclusion that it is the pursuit and not the possession which pleases, must be very miserable indeed.

Throughout my whole way I only saw two human creatures: a woman and her child, who were gleaning in a field; the child, perhaps six years old, apparently the more intent of the two in adding to the little sheaf which lay not far off, and to which she ran as often as she had perhaps a dozen straws.

The mother had the stiff, weary walk so often seen in peasants; and her dress seemed to drag about her limbs and cling to them as

she bent down again and again and recovered herself, with a certain slow regularity and heaviness that, it may be, told of rheumatism, a weak spine, or even of occasional want.

Seen against the light as I leaned over a gate, it seemed to me that an English painter of power might have made as touching a picture of these two as Millet's *Angelus*, and without the suggestion of religious relief which he finds; for it seemed as though neither of these two ever lifted eyes to the beautiful sky, or cast a glance upon the lovely tints of hedgerow, or stood and listened intently, even for an instant, to the melodious bursts of song; but went on, with continuous mechanic regularity—pick, pick, pick, stalk by stalk, of what might prove the staff of life for a day or two before long.

You speak about the factory children of old times, with their worn faces: nothing could surpass the intent hard look of some of these country children, who nowadays have to rush from helping mother or tending baby to school, and to rush back from school to the same weary task.

The boys in this respect, under later legislation, fare far better than the girls, who can be more easily turned to account inside the house; but still, now and then, in an undergrown boy who is sent out at the earliest moment to lead a horse in ploughing, etc., you may see something of the worn looks that Mrs. Henry Wood so well painted in one of her earlier "Johnny Ludlow" papers.

And all this time a more valuable harvest was at their hand if they had had the wit to see it.

As I sat on the side of that hedgerow ditch, I put out my hand and picked as many blackberries, luscious and ripe, as I wanted, and saw that already quantities were falling off wasted; hazel-nuts were also within reach, and I ate of them as many as I wanted without stirring from where I sat, and even tasted the sloes, which were still so bitter as to make my indulgence limited. But there was enough of refreshment there to recall Thoreau's words when he speaks of the rare wines bottled up in the wild fruits by the wayside for the dusty wayfarer on which no government seeks to put a tax.

Of course the great attraction of gleaning for the country people is that they can themselves deal with their corn from first to last, till it appear on the table in the form of a home-made loaf, and immediate necessities are with them always present; but it is, after all, larger purchasing power that they want; and, were a way open to them, the wearisome effort of gleaning would soon be sought by them rather as a pleasant change and relief from other work than the serious and painful business that they now make it.

And the sight of that weary couple gleaning in the field: mother and child alike with that heavy lifting of the foot which comes of habitual treading of soft or uneven surfaces, and my own restful repast in that hedgerow ditch, greeny, sweet and softly shaded, suggested to me a movement which, with wise organisation, might

well be carried into effect for the comfort, health and happiness of not a few in future years.

The harvest of the hedgerows, in such a district as ours, how welcome and highly prized it would be if it could be gathered and transported to crowded centres and sold cheaply.

Why, then, should not somebody take up the matter, and arrange to transport numbers of London children of the slums and alleys to such places to gather the harvest of the hedgerows, and thus themselves provide a large moiety of the expense of their treat in the country? The elder children could take care of the younger ones, and they could be boarded out at a moderate sum among the more cleanly and respectable villagers and farm servants, and thus the scheme might also be made of advantage to them; for were a proper channel once established for the conveyance of such fruits to London, and their sale there in the season, many of the country children would no doubt join the strangers, and show them the way through the woods and fields. They could combine nutting and sloe-gathering with blackberrying, and not a few of the hedgerows would yield a good result both in nuts and fruit.

In such a case I am inclined to believe that the farmers would be quite willing to allow the children the run of their field-sides, just as they willingly allow the run of their fields to gleaners who are known to them.

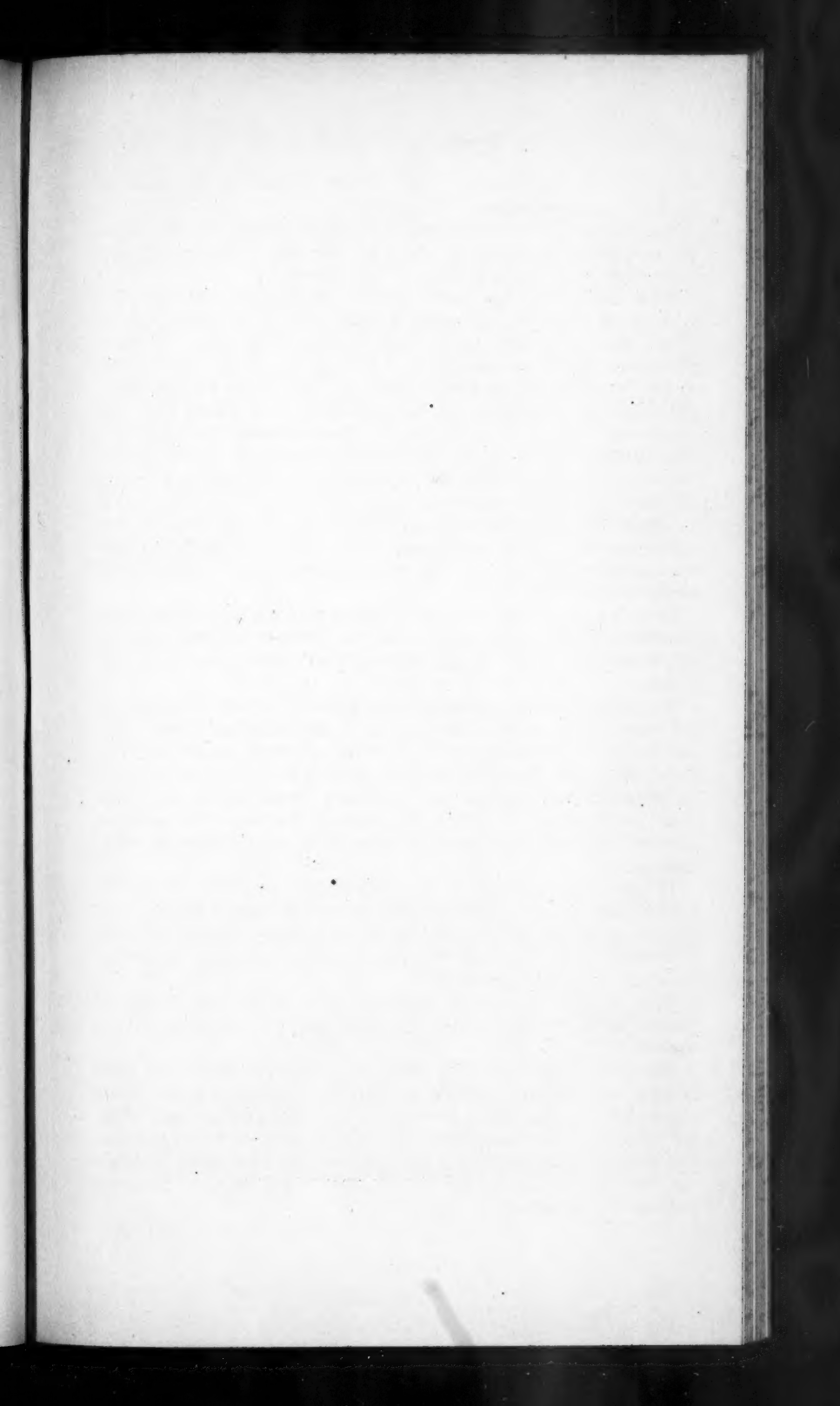
The thing could be applied to other districts; and in the region of the Surrey Hills much could be done in the gathering of the sweet and healthful whortleberries (*Hurts* as the labouring people call them there), which are often prescribed for invalids and would be welcome in infirmaries and hospitals, and which are spread thickly over large areas on these hills. They sell easily at fourpence the quart in London now, and many tons of them must go annually to waste ungathered.

Hours in the morning or evening could be devoted to hunts for mushrooms—a commodity fitted to furnish the most salutary and nourishing food in many forms, and scores of tons of which every day in autumn go to waste over the land for want of timely pickers in woods and meadows manifold.

The scheme, if properly organised (and vicars and rectors of parishes could furnish valuable aid), could not, in our idea, fail to be a success.

And even if, to some small extent, it failed in a commercial point of view, how could the children possibly have enjoyed a better outing engaged in healthy and useful work, if the weather were even ordinarily good? They would thus be kept out-of-doors with a purpose, and without the possibility of wearying, as town-bred folks (children not excepted) are so very apt to do after the first effect of freshness and novelty has worn off.

ALEX. H. JAPP, LL.D.





R. S. V. P.

R. S. V. P.

With thoughtful brow she ponders deep,
The grave sweet lips her secret keep ;
She does not smile, and does not sigh,
While thus revolving her reply—

Yet letters four, R. S. V. P.

Ye stir within her virgin heart
Some quick'ning hope, to spring and start
Through the recesses of her mind,
And leave a sunny track behind—

Ah, letters four, R. S. V. P !

She does not hear the songs of June,
Nor note the brown bees' drowsy tune,
She does not heed the wandering breeze
Outside amongst the lilac trees,

Ah, letters four, R. S. V. P.

The drooping lashes veil her eye—
What question hangs on the reply
That dyes with rose her cheek so fair ?
Will he be there—will he be there—

Ye letters four, R. S. V. P ?

She cons you o'er with anxious care—
Will he be there—will he be there ?
If by some magic ye could tell
How easy the reply—ah, well,

All potent power, R. S. V. P.

The die is cast, and she will go—
Methinks she will not answer no—
When with shy eyes again she stands,
Her white hands clasped by other hands,

Confronted by—R. S. V. P !

HELEN MARION BURNSIDE.

AUNT PEN.

BY MARY GRACE WIGHTWICK, AUTHOR OF "MRS. CARR'S COMPANION."

I.

"MY dear, I told you it would never do to neglect Aunt Penelope. She has actually written asking Mona to go and stay with her."

"Mona! *Mona!* who is not one bit nearer to her than our own girls! Besides, your aunt's an invalid—a hermit: sees no one, goes nowhere!"

"On the contrary, her health has improved. She says she feels better than at any time these last twenty years."

"You don't say so! And I thought her eighty thousand pounds as good as in the children's pockets."

"More likely to be in Mona's, from all I can see," said Mr. Hyde moodily. "She writes me three sheets, asking a dozen questions about 'her dear nephew Philip's child.' Now that Aunt Pen is stronger and able to give up recluse habits, she intends to see a little society, and means to begin by making acquaintance with her grand-niece, Mona. I suppose I must fix a day for her journey into Wales?"

"You will do no such thing!" snapped his wife. "I've thought of a better plan. It's really *too* provoking! I've always supposed Aunt Pen's twenty years' illness *could* only end in one way; and it seems scarcely fair for people to deceive their relations by pretending to be confirmed invalids when they are nothing of the kind. But as she *has* chosen to recover, there is only one thing to be done, Mr. Hyde: we must ask her *here*."

"Ask her *here*, my dear?"

"Ask her *here*," repeated Mrs. Hyde, firmly. "It will be easy enough to trump up some excuse for refusing her invitation to Mona; and that she may not be disappointed, we will ask her to come and spend a month with us and make her acquaintance. Once here, Mr. Hyde, you can judge for yourself whether a chit like Mona is likely to stand in the way of girls like my Lou and Flossie."

Besides a mixed nursery-full of little ones, more or less in the pinafore-stage of existence, Mr. and Mrs. Hyde, of Carolside, numbered among their flock two daughters, now standing with anything but "reluctant feet" upon the verge of maidenhood. Lou was nearly eighteen; Flossie a year younger. Mrs. Hyde's motherly cares were just now also extended for a few months to a young cousin of her husband's, the before-mentioned Mona, who paired in age with her own Flossie. We may be sure this astute chaperon

had good reasons for sheltering under her wing such an undesirable fledgeling as pretty penniless Mona Hyde, who, as it happened, had one desirable possession in life—a fascinating and eligible step-brother. Jack Tracy was just now on the Continent, travelling with a friend for two or three months before returning to make a home in England for his little step-sister; and meantime Mrs. Hyde was earning his lasting gratitude, and a good chance for Lou or Flossie in the near future, by inviting Mona, whose school-life at Bonn had just come to an end, to spend the interval at Carolside.

Tracy, perhaps, might have gone through life with more comfort and less persecution from manœuvring mothers, had not fate decreed him presumptive heir to an Irish Peerage. The peerage was old; so old that it had already reached the stage of decay, judging by the feebleness and infirmity of its upholders; yet still the Earls of Portpatrick (having nothing much else to boast of) prided themselves upon the inalienable privilege, dating from feudal times, of precedence in holding the stirrup for royalty whenever royalty rode abroad. And however inconvenient this heirship might be in the main, it had at least been valuable in securing for Tracy a niche in Mrs. Hyde's good graces, and a shelter for his lonely little sister under her roof.

Carolside was a comfortable, roomy old mansion, of no particular period, standing in its own well-wooded grounds. Its owner was a certain Sir Kenneth Falconer, who, finding himself at thirty bearing a burden of poverty laid upon him by many generations of spendthrift ancestors, had wisely determined to breast the tide of adverse fortune, instead of letting it overwhelm him as it had overwhelmed his father and grandfather. So very soon after succeeding to the family honours he had broken up his establishment, dismissed his servants, sold his hunters, and luckily found a tenant willing to pay a handsome rent for Carolside in the person of Mr. Hyde, a retired parson, who thought it not ignominious to enjoy life upon his wife's ample property. Mrs. Hyde's father, a noted cotton manufacturer, had bequeathed his daughter, by way of dower, a large share in his flourishing business, and a heritage of snobbism and pride of purse which harmonised ill with the stately old rooms at Carolside. But although Mrs. Hyde's bearing was not altogether patrician, her aspirations were high: in the silken surroundings of her present, she wished to forget her rough contact with cotton in the past.

The neighbourhood seemed willing to forget it too, in consideration of the pleasant little dinners and well-arranged parties by which the tenants of Carolside bid for its good graces. Yet there was one drop of gall in Mrs. Hyde's cup of sweetness. Four months had come and gone, and Sir Kenneth Falconer, the great man of the district, had not yet paid his respects to her.

The master of Carolside, exiled from his home, had retired to Falconscliffe, a solitary tower upon the sea-coast near, which had served as a dower-house to successive widowed Dames Falconer.

There, in spite of his diminished consequence, he still "held his head high, and cared for no man he."

Let us return to Carolside, roused into a flutter of preparation by Aunt Pen's expected arrival. For the invitation had been accepted, and the old lady, with her maid, her pony-carriage and her own man, was already on her way to pay them a month's visit.

When the afternoon arrived, very carefully did Mrs. Hyde marshal her forces for the inspection of Aunt Pen's critical eye, before herself going in her brougham to meet the honoured visitor at the distant country station.

"Mona! Aren't you going to drive into Burbeck with Lou and Flossie? They will bring the Thorpes back with them for a day or two."

"No, aunt"—so she always called Mrs. Hyde—"I promised Dick to walk with him to Heatherburn Hill."

"Well, don't be late. Aunt Pen will expect to find you all here when she arrives. Dick! run up before you start and change that shabby jacket. There's everything in first impressions, so be sure you keep yourself tidy. And mind, girls, you are all back quite by four o'clock. The express is always punctual."

A glance of approval from their mother's eye rested upon Lou and Flossie's stylish holland dresses as they drove off in their low basket-carriage, and thence travelled with satisfaction of a different kind to Mona's blue cotton, at least three seasons old. Yet the girl might have worn many things more unbecoming. As she danced off with little Dick, full of life and spirits, you saw only how its pale tints set off the *mignonne* figure and dark, close-curved head above it. Mona had a book with her, and when, after a tolerably long walk and several steep climbs, they found themselves upon a brown moor, Mona threw herself down amongst the bracken and was soon deep in her story. Mrs. Hyde's warnings were disregarded while Mona read on and Dick chased butterflies until four strokes suddenly clanged out from the great stable-clock of Falconscliffe, whose grey tower frowned grimly on the landscape a half-mile away between land and sea. Thereupon Dick, running up in haste, roused Mona from her abstraction into dismayed activity.

"Oh, Dick! It is nearly an hour's walk! What will your mother say?" Dick's shrug of the shoulders was small consolation.

"It would save time to cross the stream by the stepping-stones instead of going round; wouldn't it, Dick?"

Dick hailed this as a good idea, and after a quick run across the moor and a scramble down the rocky hill-side, the cousins reached the brink of the little beck brawling down from the heights.

"It is a good deal swollen by the rains," said Mona, doubtfully; "but I think we can manage it if I hold up my dress."

She gathered her skirts together, and, with laudable caution, stepped from rock to rock, Dick springing before her like a young chamois.

She shouted to him to be careful, for the wild waters swirled almost on a level with their stony causeway, but in a minute he had landed on the other side and was laughing at her fears.

She followed, reassured; two more springs would have seen her high and dry, when suddenly with a rush an enormous deerhound bounded up from behind, and startled, she slipped, lost her footing and found herself up to the waist in water.

She was close to the bank; but ere she could scramble out, a voice said pleasantly: "Allow me," two hands seized hers and she was lifted dripping and mud-encrusted on to the rocky bank.

"It was my dog's fault, I'm afraid. He is so boisterous!" said the new-comer, ruefully contemplating the result as he raised his hat. Mona's pretty pale skirt was dripping and disfigured with mud and slime, her gloves were wet and torn, her boots covered with a coating of mud to the ankle.

"You do look a pretty object!" cried Dick, more truthful than consoling.

"I really am so awfully sorry," said the voice again—a pleasant voice; and then Mona, looking up in bewildered confusion, saw that the author of her misfortune was a gentleman in shooting-coat and dark tan gaiters, whose frank blue eyes looked the remorse he felt.

"What can I do to help you? Falconscliffe is not far off; will you go there and—and make yourself tidy?"

"No; oh, no! let us get home at once, please."

"Certainly, if you prefer it; but where is your hat?"

Where indeed but swirling away in mid-stream, caught by the swift current and already well on its way seaward! Dick was the first to perceive and point it out with a shout of dismay.

"I shall have to do without it," said Mona in despair. "Come, Dick, we shall make things no better by lingering."

"Tie this scarf over your head," suggested the stranger, pointing to Mona's blue silk neckerchief; "and—excuse me—are you lame?"

"I seem to have hurt my foot somehow," said Mona reluctantly, clutching at Dick for support; "perhaps it will go off presently."

She limped a few paces over the rough ground trying to conceal the pain every step caused her, but was obliged to give up and thankfully accept the help the stranger offered. Thoroughly subdued by her misfortunes, Mona was thankful for the strong arm which at last almost carried her up the bank. She flashed him a look of gratitude out of her dark eyes as he made her rest for a minute upon a heap of stones.

"And now what is to be done? Is your home far off?" seeing that Mona looked to him for counsel.

"At Carolside."

He gave a slight start and looked more attentively at the small cavalier and the forlorn damsel, who reminded him irresistibly of

some maimed and drooping summer insect with the tender down brushed from its wings and all its radiance gone.

"It's a long way there. Ha! a good thought! Bob Wilson's cart! It should pass about this time—and here by good luck it comes. He is just back from Wildfell Market, and provided he has sold all his vegetables there will be plenty of room." Mona's good friend stopped the small boy approaching at the best jog-trot of an old pony homeward-bound; and, having ascertained that the garden-stuff was disposed of, arranged for Mona and Dick to take its place in the jolting market-cart, which Mona hailed with joy as a relief from their difficulties.

"Oh, thank you so much!" and again the dark eyes were lifted gratefully to his. "I don't know what Dick and I would ever have done without you! It would not have mattered so much but for Aunt Pen's coming. However, it can't be helped; *you* at least have done all you could; good-bye." She gave him her hand with childish simplicity and nodded with a grave smile as the cart jolted away towards Carolside, leaving him looking after them, bareheaded, with a puzzled expression on his good-looking face.

"Not altogether one's idea of a fabric of *cotton* manufacture! Perhaps I have been foolishly prejudiced," was his inward comment. "Well! I must make an effort—call at Carolside and make amends."

II.

At last the house came in sight, and Mona peremptorily bade the driver turn aside to the back entrance. Thence she hoped unobserved to slip across the hall and gain her own room by a side staircase. The driver helped her down, and with pain and difficulty Mona, still holding by Dick, managed to limp along the stone passages to a swing-door leading into the hall. All seemed silent, and they ventured through. But, alas! the culprits were barely midway, when suddenly the drawing-room door opened, and a little troop of people flocked out, barring their further passage. They could neither go forward nor retreat unseen. Acres of polished flooring seemed to lie between Mona and any hiding-place.

"Why, Mona! what have you been doing with yourself?"

Her aunt's sharp, penetrating voice called attention to the fugitives. Conscious of her untidy hair and dishevelled appearance, Mona stood at bay in her dark corner, fervently wishing herself back on the banks of the stream—or *in* it, for that matter.

"This is Mona, Aunt Pen," said Mrs. Hyde, with a careless wave of the hand towards where the poor girl stood, blushing and confused.

"So this is Mona! And pray what has she been doing to make herself in such a deplorable condition?" asked Aunt Pen, examining her critically.

"Explain yourself, Mona," commanded Mrs. Hyde majestically:

adding, with a shrug of her ample shoulders: "Always in some scrape or other."

The Fates had favoured her to-day, and Mrs. Hyde would have been more than mortal if she had not experienced a glow of satisfaction as Mona faltered out a brief explanation of their delay and the disaster, whose effects were so plainly visible, while little Dick added in his shrill treble: "And she couldn't walk, so the strange gentleman helped her up the bank and sent us home in the cart."

"The gentleman!" cried Mrs. Hyde. "I trust no friend of mine saw you in that plight!"

"It was no one we knew. I had never seen him before," pleaded Mona, hoping to make matters better.

"What! You have been making acquaintance indiscriminately with a stranger? Really, Mona, I can't trust you out of my sight! So particular as I am, too!" And Mrs. Hyde launched into a lecture, in which little laudations of her own watchfulness and upbraidings of Mona were about equally mixed.

Mona stood abashed. She had exhausted her defence, and could only listen in respectful silence, until Aunt Pen said coldly: "I think we have heard enough. Mona had better go upstairs and make herself tidy. Did you say the pictures you wished to show me were in the dining-room, Mrs. Hyde?"

The possessor of eighty thousand pounds could speak with the voice of authority in that house. Mrs. Hyde turned to her guest, all smiles, and the party swept on without vouchsafing another look at Mona, who thankfully limped away as best she might. Her foot was growing more and more painful; she was shivering with the drive in her wet clothes, and was so weary that she ventured to send a message of excuse to her aunt instead of going down to dinner.

The evening wore on: gay sounds of dance music began presently to steal up from the hall; the maids were probably looking on at the fun. Disconsolate, mortified and chilled to the bone, Mona crept to bed at last, full of self-pity, and hoping to find relief in sleep from pain, mental and physical. But her injured ankle was now taking its revenge for all her ill-treatment, and throbbed and ached without ceasing as she lay, now at fever-heat, now shivering with cold, while the gay music below beat upon her tired ears with aggravating monotony hour after hour; so it seemed to the weary listener, whose sole distraction was the reviewing, again and again, the mortifications of that wretched afternoon.

Presently there was a tap at the door, and in answer to Mona's faint "Come in," there entered a little old lady, in black, and an elderly maid carrying a candle, who remained respectfully standing near the door, while her mistress advanced to the bedside. Poor Mona's senses were so dazed with pain and fatigue, that it took her a minute or two to identify the upright form, severe, clear-cut features and piercing blue eyes with those of the dreaded Aunt Pen.

The vision naturally did not tend to reassure her. She lay silent, gazing at her visitor with wide-open, frightened eyes.

"Is anything the matter, child? My maid tells me she heard sounds as though someone were in pain; her room is next to yours."

"It's my ankle," said Mona, piteously. "It aches and burns so that I cannot sleep."

"Let me see," said Aunt Pen. Without even waiting to remind Mona it was her own fault—as Mrs. Hyde certainly would have done—Aunt Pen called her maid to hold the candle while she herself examined the injured foot. Even such gentle pressure made Mona wince.

"Not sprained, but the muscles are strained probably. We must try and doctor it. Griffiths and I have plenty of practice among our poor people, and understand such things. Griffiths! bring my little medicine chest." Then, as her handmaid glided away: "Has no one been near you, child? Why didn't you ring?"

"I did, three times; but perhaps the servants are busy; no one came."

"H'm! a pretty thing, indeed! Have you had nothing to eat, pray?"

"I didn't want any dinner; I felt so cold and shivery."

"And are you shivering still?" Aunt Pen laid a cool hand on Mona's burning brow, and answered her own question. "Ah! a feverish cold. Griffiths shall get you something." For all her fear, Mona mustered courage to remonstrate.

"If you please, I would rather not make a fuss. Aunt Hyde will say it is all my own fault."

"Which is true, I suppose. Never mind now, you shall tell me all about it another time. Now, Griffiths," as the maid re-entered, "some cold water, and a roll of linen rag."

Mona felt she was in good hands, and submitted passively to Aunt Pen's gentle handling. Her very touch had comfort in it, and soothed almost as much as the cooling lotion which Griffiths quickly concocted. Mona gave a sigh of relief when she presently found herself re-arranged upon a cool pillow, with the pain in her ankle already allayed. Even then Aunt Pen was not content until she had sent Griffiths downstairs and seen her return with a cup of steaming arrowroot, which the old lady arbitrarily administered.

"There, now you will sleep, and let me hear no more groans. If you want anything more, call Griffiths. Good-night, child." She laid her hand on Mona's dark head with something between a pat and a caress, and glided away as quickly as she had come.

Mona was painfully labouring through her toilet next morning when her cousin Lou burst in upon her.

"Not ready, Mona? Why, how doleful you look! Are you ill? I thought you were shamming last night to keep out of Aunt Pen's way. What could induce you to get into such a scrape? She's

awfully particular! Snapped me up short because I didn't answer papa in quite Johnsonian language; and found fault with Dick for lounging on the sofa. I declare, you do look ill though, Mona. Get back into bed and I'll tell Lydia to bring you up some breakfast."

"Thank you; if your mother won't mind," said Mona.

"Oh! I'll make it all right with her. And, if you don't want a lecture, it's about the wisest thing you can do to lie snug for a day or two till Aunt Pen's got over it a little. But I expect you've done for yourself with her."

"It can't be helped now," said Mona dejectedly.

Curled up in an arm-chair, Mona had not long despatched her breakfast when another visitor invaded her solitude in the person of Mrs. Hyde, irate and overpowering.

"My dear Mona! What is all this I hear? I don't wish to find fault, but really your thoughtless ways are very trying, as I was telling your aunt only this morning. You quite disturbed Miss Hyde last night, and if you *are* ill, as she makes out, remember you have only yourself to thank for it. Not but what you're looking much as usual."

"It's only a cold," said Mona in the first pause.

"Oh, that's nothing! But as I hear you are lame into the bargain, it won't do you any harm to stay upstairs, and if you are dull it's entirely your own doing. Really, Mona, it is most aggravating! Your brother would be very much displeased with you. Such harum-scarum ways will make him miserable. Well, good-bye—it is so fine that the Garnetts and ourselves are all going to picnic at the Holy Well. Of course you'll have to miss it now. People must pay for their folly."

Mona sank back in her chair as the door closed, and tears of mortification sprang to her eyes. Jack displeased! Jack made miserable by her folly! This was worse than all! All her hopes and aspirations, present and future, grouped themselves round this beloved step-brother, who, to Mona at least, was the incarnation of everything great and good. Any day, any hour, might bring the welcome letter announcing his coming, or—better still—the wanderer himself. Each clang of the front-door bell louder and more imperative than usual brought Mona's heart into her mouth with joyful expectation. But if he returned only to be made miserable by his little sister's thoughtlessness——! Oh! what could she do to cure herself of her dreamy ways—to make herself more fit to be his companion?

Presently a knock at her door was followed by the entrance of Griffiths and Griffiths's stately little mistress. The folds of Miss Hyde's rich silk dress hung from her waist severe and plain, without a crumple; her black cap and collar were adjusted to a nicety. Mona started up in confusion, but a sudden twinge from her foot made her sink back again pale with pain and a fear of her visitor, revived

by Lou's warnings. The terrible little lady's fierce blue eyes seemed to pierce her through and through. But perhaps Aunt Pen was disarmed for the present by Mona's helplessness, for she only laid a gentle hand on her niece's head and asked how she was.

"Griffiths is going to make your foot comfortable, and then, if you like, she shall help you to finish dressing."

There was only one difficulty about this last: no suitable costume seemed forthcoming for Mona's wear that morning. The pretty blue of yesterday hung limp and bespattered over a chair; Mona blushed as she looked at it. Her two remaining cottons were in the laundress's hands, as she remembered with dismay.

"Perhaps this will do?" suggested Griffiths, bringing forward a pretty cream nun's veil.

"The gathers are out, and the flounce is torn," said Mona, hanging her head guiltily. "I caught it on a bush, and forgot to mend it yesterday."

"Griffiths will mend it for you while we have a little talk together. See! I've brought my knitting, for I never waste a moment if it can be helped."

She drew a sock of soft yarn from her pocket and began to knit rapidly. Griffiths departed with the ill-used dress, and Mona waited in some trepidation for the expected scolding. Aunt Pen looked up at last, but only to say cheerfully: "And now we are alone, suppose you tell me the history of your accident yesterday. I want to know how it came about, and why Mrs. Hyde was so much displeased."

Mona flushed painfully, but the blue eyes, if kind, were imperious; and without more ado she related the afternoon's adventures.

"And the stranger who helped you—don't you know who it was?"

"No; but he was a gentleman, I'm sure; and so kind—the kindest man I ever met, except Jack."

"Your brother?"

"Yes;" and Mona's eyes kindled. "There he is! That's Jack!"

She pointed to a cabinet photo, framed in plush, of a handsome young fellow about a dozen years her senior.

"Isn't he handsome?" said Mona, enthusiastically, regarding her brother with admiring eyes; but Griffiths's timely entrance with the repaired dress interrupted her sisterly praises, perhaps to Aunt Pen's advantage.

"And now," said Aunt Pen, "now that the frock is ready, suppose you put it on. I am going to exercise my ponies after luncheon, and you may come too and get a little fresh air. A drive this lovely day won't hurt either of us, though we may not be equal to a picnic."

The prospective treat lent energy to the finishing of Mona's toilet, and when after luncheon Griffiths helped her downstairs and in to the comfortable low phaeton, where Miss Hyde was already seated, Mona began to think that the tide of her fortunes had turned.

The ponies sped fast and so did time, till they found themselves presently in Burbeck High Street.

"Which is the best draper's?" asked Aunt Pen. "I have a little shopping to do."

Mona directed the coachman to an imposing-looking establishment, always favoured with Carolside patronage, and Miss Hyde disappeared within it. She was gone some time, while Mona amused herself looking in the gay windows and wishing she had the wherewithal to buy some of their contents. Jack was generous, but forgetful. It was a long time now since he had remembered to replenish her purse, and eighteenpence represented her whole worldly wealth. As she looked and longed, a horseman riding down the street with slackened rein observed her curiously—hesitated—rode on—looked again—then turned his horse's head, and pulled up at her side. As he took off his hat she recognised her friend of the day before. The quick colour flushed her cheeks.

"I hope you are none the worse for your adventure yesterday, Miss Hyde? I couldn't sleep all night for thinking of my clumsiness."

"Yes—no, thank you; only a little lame," she stammered confusedly. "Please don't blame yourself. I am always unlucky."

"What a confession!" said Aunt Pen, who returned at this moment in time to catch the frank, amused smile with which the stranger greeted the remark. "Who is your friend, child?"

"My name is Falconer," he answered for himself with a bow. "I am Mr. Hyde's landlord and nearest neighbour. I was the unlucky author of Miss Hyde's accident yesterday and have just been calling at Carolside to make my peace."

"Well, sir! if my niece forgives you, I will. The adventure earned her a lecture; but I daresay she will be all the better for it."

The stranger's face fell as he glanced at Mona, scarcely knowing whether to take the brusque words in jest or earnest. Her smile reassured him. Perhaps the awe-inspiring little personage with the fierce blue eyes was less terrible to her *entourage* than she seemed.

"My conscience pricks me afresh now that I hear Miss Hyde is still lame," he said, ruefully.

"Well! People must suffer for their folly. However, I think she can manage to get across the pavement here. I want to show her my purchases. Come, child!"

Aunt Pen put out her hand to help her niece, nodding over her shoulder such a peremptory dismissal that their new acquaintance could not choose but accept it, with a farewell glance at Mona as he raised his hat and rode away. Mona's attention was quickly distracted as they entered the inner compartment of the shop, which was strewn with materials of every colour. Miss Hyde pointed to a pretty pale blue cashmere, a cream muslin and a pink cotton. "There, Mona, I hope you will like them; the dressmaker promises to have them all ready in a week; she will take your measure at once."

Mona's eyes opened wide with surprise as she faltered her thanks, hardly able to believe in this speedy fulfilment of her wishes. But while the dressmaker was busy, Aunt Pen trotted away to make other purchases, and Mona was obliged to postpone the expression of her gratitude.

"I wonder what makes you so kind to me?" ventured Mona, wistfully, when they were in the carriage again.

Aunt Pen did not answer for a few moments. Her eyes were fixed upon the summer landscape, but she was looking through and beyond it to a land that is very far off. Presently she laid her hand gently on her niece's.

"Child! I loved your father," she said quietly. "He was like a son to me."

Mona's eyes seemed to question further, though Mona herself sat touched and silent. Nothing more was said during the rest of the drive.

III.

THE radiance of triumph which illumined Mrs. Hyde's face when she returned from the picnic to find Sir Kenneth Falconer's card upon her hall-table was good to behold, and when the circumstances of his visit transpired, Mona was inwardly blessed and forgiven on the spot. Of course it was annoying that the long-desired visitor should have arrived to find them out (the girls just looking their best, too!); but Mrs. Hyde's quick brains were soon at work to remedy this misfortune. "Mr. Hyde! you must return Sir Kenneth's call to-morrow, and leave a card for our tennis-party on Friday, and an invitation to dine here afterwards."

The cup of Mrs. Hyde's satisfaction brimmed over when Mona, who felt tired after her drive and its various excitements, elected to join the schoolroom-tea instead of appearing at late dinner. This arrangement left Lou and Flossie free to display their charms unrivalled, and show that pretty deference to Aunt Pen's old-fashioned tastes which their mother had privately prompted. Flossie performed most creditably a brilliant Fantasia on *Jenny Jones*, while Lou engaged her aunt in a game of cribbage, such a recently-learned accomplishment of Lou's that the old lady could not fail to win.

No groans disturbed the visitor's rest that night; perhaps Aunt Pen before retiring made it her business to see that her young neighbour was comfortable and well cared-for.

The tennis-lawn at Carolside lay behind the house at the foot of a series of turfed terraces gay with flowers, and was fringed upon its further border by some grand old cedars which had been the pride of the Falconers for generations. Just now the well-kept greensward, the bowling-green of former days, was sprinkled with a score or two of gaily-dressed people, among whom were conspicuous Flossie and Lou Hyde in pretty tennis costumes of white and pink, wielding their

racquets with such success that they were popular partners with the half-dozen men in flannels who represented the *Cheviot Borderers*, now quartered at Burbeck Barracks.

Sir Kenneth Falconer was there too, though not in flannels. He had played a set with Lou Hyde, but with no great enthusiasm, and had then strolled away towards the cedars, under whose shadow he had espied a diminutive little person encamped upon the grass. Play was out of the question for Mona to-day, although she was so nearly well that there was no possible pretext for keeping her indoors. She was her blithe self again too, very unlike the forlorn damsel Sir Kenneth had helped out of the beck. But the recollection of that miserable day brought a blush to her cheek as Sir Kenneth drew a book from his pocket and handed it to her. It had a familiar aspect, though the bright red binding was spotted and spoiled.

"I found this next morning on a stone near where you fell; the spray had sprinkled it for hours, but it had escaped drowning."

Mona murmured her thanks in some confusion. The book would have unpleasant associations for her in future.

"I've been wondering ever since I found it," Sir Kenneth said, musingly, "what Christian name this *M.* belongs to?" and he turned to the fly-leaf and showed the *M. Hyde*. "It might stand for Margaret, or Mary?"

"It might," said Mona, demurely, "yet neither is my name."

"Of course not. Yours would be something much more uncommon and poetical; Madeleine, perhaps? or Muriel? You look rather like a Muriel."

"Then my looks belie me," said Mona gaily, quite at her ease now.

"They cannot have had the cruelty to call you Martha?"

"Why not, pray? I might have turned out the most sedate person possible for all they could tell. But don't trouble to guess any more, for I don't intend telling you what name I answer to."

"Mona!" called Aunt Pen, who, with the perpetual knitting in hand, was sitting under a garden-umbrella not far off, talking to another dowager. The colour rose from Mona's throat to her tiny ears, but she sat on, wilfully pretending not to hear.

"Mona! Mona!" Aunt Pen cried again; and this time it was out of the question to feign deafness. She rose and went unwillingly to answer her aunt's call, returning in a minute or two rather crestfallen.

"Mona is a sweet name, and suits you to perfection," was Sir Kenneth's mischievous greeting. "I prefer it to any of the others. Now tell me, is that terrible little lady who was with you the other day the Aunt Pen you spoke of?" and lowering his voice, "is she so very dreadful?"

"Not very. I'm much more afraid of Aunt Hyde," laughed Mona.

"But surely Mrs. Hyde is your mother?"

"Indeed she is not!" Mona answered indignantly.

"Your step-mother, at least?"

"Neither; Mrs. Hyde is my first-cousin's wife. I only call her aunt for convenience' sake; and Lou and Flossie, the girls in pink there, are my second cousins."

Sir Kenneth breathed a sigh of relief. "Of course, I might have guessed as much! You are so different from what I expected!"

A demure but very intelligible smile curved Mona's pretty lips.

"How funny! and *you* are so different from what *I* expected!"

"Really?"

"Falconscliffe is such a romantic-looking old place that I imagined its owner a grim, fierce, tyrannical *Front-de-Bœuf* sort of person that everyone must be afraid of, and I find you a—a——"

"An every-day young man, of the mildest possible disposition," laughed Sir Kenneth pleasantly. "But tell me, are you disappointed? did you prefer the imaginary Sir Kenneth to the real one?"

"I hardly know. No doubt it will take me a little time to get over the shock."

"I should so like to show you Falconscliffe. Couldn't you persuade Mrs. Hyde to bring you over some day?"

"I could not, but perhaps *you* might. It would be delightful; I have so often longed to climb that grim old tower."

"And nothing would give me greater pleasure than to see you do it. I must speak to Mrs. Hyde this evening, for she has asked me to stay and dine."

"And you will invite Lou and Flossie too? and Aunt Pen?"

"Of course. You must all come and lunch with me, and the sooner the better. I'll get Mrs. Hyde to fix a day."

"Oh, I hope she will say yes!" said Mona, clasping her hands ecstatically. Then sobering down: "There, I must go! Aunt Hyde is beckoning me to help her with the tea."

"Mayn't I come too?"

"Presently, when the cups are ready. Just now you would only be in the way."

So Sir Kenneth remained, lying *perdu* in the shade of his own ancestral cedars, lazily amused with the scraps of talk that floated to him upon the summer air.

Meantime, Aunt Pen close by was chatting now to an elderly maiden lady whom Mrs. Hyde had introduced, hoping, as she said to herself, "that the two old tabbies would amuse each other." Miss Prawle was a sworn foe to modern men and manners, and never tired of holding forth upon the delinquencies of both to anyone who would lend a willing ear. If she had been the mummy of some Egyptian queen of an early dynasty lately disinterred from an entombment of ages, Miss Prawle could scarcely have been more horrified by the sights and sounds around her. Every day, nay, every hour, brought some fresh shock to her moral system, under which her sense of propriety reeled. Sir Kenneth well knew her little weakness, and was

not surprised to hear that she had got upon the usual topic with her sympathising listener.

"The young men nowadays use such dreadful language,"—she was confiding to Aunt Pen—"and not only among themselves, but even when ladies are present. I hardly like to shock you, Miss Hyde, by repeating such language, but would you believe that when I was at Chaldicotes yesterday, looking on at the tennis (Chaldicotes is Lady Anne Hampton's place, you know), her nephew—that gentlemanly youth over there—actually shouted out '*Deuce!*' without the least disguise?"

"Shocking!" murmured Aunt Pen, who had not yet been initiated into the mysteries of lawn tennis.

"But I must say the young women are nearly as bad," lamented Miss Prawle sadly. "You see that pretty girl with the fair hair? She was also one of the players, and at first I thought her rather lady-like, but when her partner asked her some question about the score, she actually answered, '*Thirty, love!!*' although they had only been introduced to each other that afternoon. So bold and forward of her!"

Aunt Pen nodded a horrified assent, while her bright knitting-pins chased each other diligently round their brown treadmill.

"I found afterwards that many of the other girls talked in the same way; and I was so horrified that once I said aloud '*Love!* What can they mean by it?' And young Browning, who was just at my elbow, sprawling on the bank in the usual fashion nowadays, happened to overhear, and answered, coolly and grave as a judge, '*Love!* Oh! that means nothing!' *Nothing!* Miss Hyde. But when I was young, love meant a great deal! It meant marriage settlements and a comfortable home in most cases. Love between two young things was a serious undertaking then; but *now*—the world seems to me just upside down!"

And Miss Prawle indignantly knitted a strand of disgust and disapproval in with the stiff yarn of her charity sock.

If, when evening came, Sir Kenneth Falconer found it painful to be received as a guest in his own ancestral halls—if he found it difficult to accept Mrs. Hyde's rather oppressive hospitality with a good grace, he did his best to conceal his feelings, inspired to the effort by a certain bewitching little face upon the opposite side of the table which attracted him irresistibly. He *talked*, it is true, to Lou Hyde, skilfully placed by her mother at his other side: but he *looked* at Mona; and if he had thought her a winsome little lady when he first made her acquaintance, emerging dripping from the beck, how much the more was she to be admired in the pretty fresh muslin and blue ribbons which she owed to Aunt Pen's generosity?

Having once broken the ice and found the plunge on the whole less disagreeable than he had expected, Sir Kenneth's appearances at Carolside became pretty frequent. His appeal to Mrs. Hyde had been successful, and with a thrill of inward gratification she had

accepted the invitation to Falconscliffe for all her party, and Thursday in the following week was fixed for the luncheon which was to cost its giver much thought and pains in the preparation.

But long before that day arrived, Sir Kenneth found many excuses for exchanging the loneliness of Falconscliffe for the sociable circle at Carolside. Mrs. Hyde was nothing if not hospitable; and had a specially hearty welcome and a knife and fork always ready for any eligible bachelor likely to develop into a Benedick. So on Sunday, when Sir Kenneth turned up at the village church—hitherto it had been his custom to stride over the moors to the little iron church at Wildfell, to avoid the pain of seeing strangers occupy his family pew—and joined Flossie afterwards, what more natural than for Mrs. Hyde to persuade him back to luncheon?

"The more the merrier, *I* say," she declared emphatically, and made Sir Kenneth feel so much at home that he prolonged his visit over supper time; and it was the moon and not the sun which lighted his walk back to Falconscliffe.

As he smoked his cigar upon the homeward way, he went over again in thought the day's experiences: the pleasant afternoon ramble through the Carolside woods; the ample tea—North-country fashion; the cheerful family-dinner and supper—it was the Hyde custom to dine early on Sunday—such a contrast to his lonely meals. And Sir Kenneth smiled to himself as he recalled a little scene which had given him an insight into the character of his hostess, and of another person also who interested him more.

The talk at early dinner had happened upon modern fashions of hair-dressing, and Miss Hyde, being appealed to by her host, gave her opinion pretty strongly, and, as might be expected, in favour of the good old times.

"When I was young," said Aunt Pen, emphatically, "it was thought a beauty for a woman's hair to be smooth and glossy and well-cared-for. Girls had not learnt to dress their heads like men, nor was towzled hair considered becoming."

Aunt Pen was looking down at her plate, but none the less did Mrs. Hyde appropriate the observation.

"To be sure! There is great truth in what you say, Miss Hyde; and I often tell my girls they must keep their hair more tidy. I'm sure there's no excuse, with a maid always at their disposal! But *some* people admire natural curls." Mrs. Hyde glanced at Sir Kenneth; but if the remark was intended to extract a compliment it failed in its effect, and nothing more was said—in public, at all events. When Lou and Flossie appeared at tea-time, however, their wavy fringes were smoothed neatly back; and a coil of plaits, tidily arranged, supplanted the curls at the back.

"A great improvement, my dears!" was their mother's gratified comment. "I hope your aunt agrees with me. You won't part with *your* curls I see, Mona?"

"No, aunt; Jack likes them, and Jack comes first," Mona answered gently.

Mrs. Hyde shrugged her shoulders and murmured—though not loud enough for Mona to hear—"What a wilful little piece of vanity it is!"

"I am so glad you have not given up your curls," said Sir Kenneth aside to Mona, later in the evening; "they are so becoming."

"Oh, I don't care about that! I only stick to my curls because Jack likes them so much."

"And so do I."

"That's lucky; for even if you did not, I'm afraid you would have to put up with them because of Jack," Mona answered coolly.

"Jack! always Jack!" exclaimed Sir Kenneth moodily, his sunny face clouding for an instant. "I think Jack is a person to be envied."

While Sir Kenneth walked home under the stars, his thoughts full of Jack's wilful little sister, Aunt Pen, overtaking Mona as she lingered in the gallery on her way to her room, laid her hand laughingly upon the girl's dark head.

"Good-night, little Mona! It is well for you that you are not at Aunt Hyde's disposal. She would have this curly head shaved altogether if I only expressed the wish."

IV.

THE longed-for Thursday fixed for the visit to Falconsccliffe dawned at last, and besides its blissful anticipations, brought Mona a letter from Jack. These careless, hastily-scribbled missives were the joy of his young sister's heart, and the arrival of one would make her happy for days.

"Does Jack say when he is coming? Will he be in time for our dance on the 10th?" asked Mrs. Hyde, smiling graciously upon Jack's sister, already absorbed in her letter.

Mona hastily ran through the pages and her face fell.

"He never mentions it. I'm afraid it won't be so soon as that, though; for he says that he is lionising some American friends through Paris. How I hate them for keeping Jack away from me!"

Mrs. Hyde in her heart echoed the sentiment. It was too annoying to think of Jack Tracy, the future Lord Portpatrick, exposed to all sorts of dangers from worldly mothers—a class Mrs. Hyde detested—upon the other side of the Channel, while Lou and Flossie were wasting their attractions on the detrimentals of the neighbourhood—undergraduates home for vacation, penniless curates and ineligible subs. from the *Borderers*. To be sure, there was now Sir Kenneth. Lady Falconer would have an unexceptionable position in the county; and a pleasing castle arose in the air at the bidding of Mrs. Hyde's fertile imagination.

Her trump-card was a grand ball, fixed for the end of the following week, for which she had already issued invitations. It was to witness both Lou and Flossie's formal introduction to society, and at the same time astonish the county with the splendour of Carolside hospitality under the new régime. But much might also be done in the visit to Falconscliffe, about which Sir Kenneth had seemed so eager. As luck would have it, too, her girls would have the field to themselves; for the morning dawned cloudy and cold: Aunt Pen had twinges of rheumatism, and asked Mrs. Hyde to make her excuses to Sir Kenneth, as she dared not face the bleak moorland winds. The party without her could all be accommodated in the barouche—all but Mona, that is; and needless to say, such an insignificant item was not worth considering. Nevertheless, Mrs. Hyde made a point of explaining to Aunt Pen the necessity for leaving Mona at home, with many laments that the child should lose her pleasure.

"However, Miss Hyde, these disappointments *will* happen, and Mona must just learn to bear them better. As I tell her, she can't expect all the indulgences of grown-up girls; but, between ourselves, I'm afraid she is getting a little spoilt, what with your kindness and what with my own."

A shade had overspread Aunt Pen's face while her hostess was speaking, and at the end she said coldly: "I am sorry to have put all the plans out of joint in this way. Can nothing be managed?"

"Nothing, I fear," answered Mrs. Hyde with some stiffness. "Being a first visit, I must take Mr. Hyde with me, and Sir Kenneth made such a point of both my girls going."

"In that case there is no more to be said," Aunt Pen rejoined, as though dismissing the subject.

Mrs. Hyde turned at the door to express a parting hope that her visitor would make herself quite at home in her absence, and order anything and everything she wished. "And please don't trouble about Mona, dear Miss Hyde. I've given her some work to do—some books her uncle wants arranged and catalogued. Girls are all the better for being busy, and she won't have time to fret."

Would she not? Tender-hearted Aunt Pen did not feel so sure of that as she sat in her own room watching the party drive off, and thinking of Mona's wistful face. "Little puss! she finds her way to one's heart somehow!" she thought to herself as she took up her knitting and listened for Mona's step on the stair, which had come to be such a familiar sound. But to-day all was silent.

As the morning wore away the clouds dispersed, the wind dropped, and, after one or two struggles, the sun shone out brightly.

"Griffiths!" called Aunt Pen, presently, "go and find Miss Mona at once and bring her here to me. I don't know where she is. Look everywhere."

Griffiths *did* look everywhere, and at last found a tear-stained, dust-begrimed Mona in the library among the books. She had just

finished her catalogue, but, conscious of her unpresentable appearance, would fain have stayed where she was. Griffiths, however, would take no denial, and faithfully ushered Mona to the threshold of Miss Hyde's room.

Mona, standing just within the doorway, as much in shadow as possible, with drooping head and downcast eyes, asked meekly: "Did you want me, Aunt Pen?"

"Yes, my dear. What have you been doing all this time?" regarding her niece attentively through her gold-rimmed eye-glasses.

"Arranging books and making a list of them for uncle. I'm afraid I'm untidy, but Griffiths wouldn't wait."

"Have you been doing nothing else?" going up to Mona and laying a kind hand upon her shoulder. "Ah! just as I thought! Crying your eyes out."

Mona knew Aunt Pen better now and was sure of her sympathy.

"Oh, aunt! I did so want to see Falconscliffe! And I'm quite sure Sir Kenneth meant me to go, for he asked me first of all. It wasn't just out of politeness to her, as Aunt Hyde said. But I know I'm very silly to mind so much."

"*Very*. Life is full of disappointments, child. We must learn to put up with them, for 'what can't be cured must be endured,' and endured with a good grace, too. There!" (with a kiss) "I'm not so *very* angry with you. The sun is shining and my rheumatism is better, and I'm going to drive directly after luncheon and mean to take you with me. Make yourself smart, for perhaps we may look in at Falconscliffe and see what they are doing."

And so it happened that just as Sir Kenneth's guests had finished luncheon and he was preparing with rather a bored face to do the honours of Falconscliffe, there came a roll of wheels in the courtyard and a peremptory clang of the bell, followed by the entrance of Aunt Pen leaning on Mona's arm. That naive little person knew not how to dissemble, and her face was radiant as Sir Kenneth's own as he sprang forward to greet them.

"The sun came out and so did I," Aunt Pen explained bluntly. "Being a woman, I knew, Sir Kenneth, you would allow me a woman's privilege of changing my mind. Thanks; we lunched before we started, but we are both very curious to see this grim old home of yours."

"Yes, do let us begin to explore!" Lou cried eagerly. "Mona, you have no idea what a jolly old place this is—quite too delicious for anything! I should awfully like to live here!"

"Dear Lou is so transparent!" murmured Lou's mother aside to Aunt Pen.

The little old lady turned upon her an uncomprehending stare. "Do you think so? To me at times Lou is quite unintelligible. Mr. Hyde, will you give me your arm? I can't do without a prop to-day. Sir Kenneth had better lead the way with the young people."

The young people, nothing loth, trooped off, and soon the old roof-tree was ringing with their merry laughter. The elders followed more slowly through the living-rooms on the ground-floor, occupied by Sir Kenneth—oak-panelled these, and modern only by comparison—to the low-browed stone archway leading to the older part of the building. Sir Kenneth and the cousins had already ascended the old stairway, worn by the feet of many generations, to the second tier, where the panting elders came up with them in a stately apartment, vaulted and arched with stone, which had once served as banqueting-room to Falconers long deceased.

"I prefer the snugger downstairs," Sir Kenneth was explaining, "but this is the banqueting-hall proper, where my forefathers did their entertaining."

"I like this best," said Mona eagerly; "and what lovely windows!"

The windows, blazoned with coats-of-arms and quaint and curious devices, were of fair size, and looked seaward; the ground on this side was of higher level, and not far below the deep window-embrasures.

"Is this your crest, Sir Kenneth; this queer bird with the ribbons hanging to its feet?" Lou asked curiously. "There it is again, carved in stone over the fireplace."

Sir Kenneth smiled. "Yes, that is the falcon which laid the foundations of the family fortunes. Tradition has it that for loyal service done (something in the fighting way, you may be sure), one of the chase-loving Norman Kings granted my lucky ancestor as much land as a falcon, flying from his wrist, should measure out before he perched. The gallant bird did his best, no doubt, for from that time forth his descendants, in grateful remembrance, have borne as their cognisance 'a falcon rising, jessed and belled.' You see the device repeated again in the windows here."

Aunt Pen glanced at Mona's kindling face, seeing, perhaps, girlish enthusiasms of her own reviving again in her bright-eyed niece. "A pretty legend, Sir Kenneth," was the old lady's comment. "But no falcon won you all this?" and she waved towards the wide tract of heather and moorland stretching to the woods of Carolside.

"Oh, no! we did the rest ourselves," confessed Sir Kenneth, gaily. "And as for Carolside, a bold ancestor of mine—one, Sir Roger—carried off its heiress, and kept her in durance vile until she agreed to marry him and endow him with her fair estates. Come this way, and I will show you the place of her captivity."

He led them to an upper story, where they found in one of the octagonal turrets a small room with one window looking out over the wild waves. "Here it is—the Ladye Bertha's room, they call it. The loudest cries for help would go unheeded here, you may be sure, and no signal of distress would avail much from such an outlook."

"And pray what was the King about to let such things go on?" asked Mrs. Hyde, indignantly.

"He was wily enough to wink at such peccadilloes in a loyal subject," laughed her husband. "And I daresay Sir Roger remembered his complaisance when the time came for a loan of money or men."

"Did the lady hold out long?" questioned Mona, who was thinking sympathetically of the poor captive in her lonely eyrie.

"Oh, no! the tale goes that she soon forgave her suitor the rough manner of his wooing, and made him, in every sense of the word, a valuable wife. 'Fortune favours the brave,' you know. Perhaps it was about that time we first adopted the motto."

"It was an appropriate one, no doubt," said Mr. Hyde. "The bold and successful raids of the wild Falconers are notorious in all the country round. In those days I shouldn't have cared for a Falconer as neighbour, to pounce upon all I held most precious."

"Never mind, Mr. Hyde," Sir Kenneth said, smiling; "you see before you a refreshing instance of poetical justice. My ancestors in the old days began by pillaging other people, and ended by pillaging themselves. And now" (with a sigh) "this old tower, the cradle of our race, has come to be the only dwelling-place their descendant can afford to inhabit. Miss Mona, there are still some steps between us and the battlements; you undertook to climb to the top."

"But I did not," broke in Aunt Pen; "and with your permission, Sir Kenneth, Mrs. Hyde and I will just sit here and wait till you come down again."

And perching herself upon a seat in the deep-recessed window, as the captive heiress perhaps did long ago, Aunt Pen nodded the young people a peremptory dismissal, while Mrs. Hyde, nothing loth, sank into a chair beside her. Her husband elected for the climb, and followed the others, the eager host piloting the way with Mona beside him.

The sound of their steps and voices grew fainter in the distance, and Mrs. Hyde and Aunt Pen were left to entertain each other.

"He is expiating his forefathers' faults rather dearly, poor fellow," Aunt Pen said musingly, following out her own thoughts, oblivious of her uncongenial companion; "but it's a plucky thing to do, and I like him for it."

"I like him too, *immensely*," assented Mrs. Hyde with all the fervour of a would-be mother-in-law; "and I am glad to see that Mr. Hyde has taken quite a fancy to him and treats him like—like a son, in fact; so we are all of one mind," with a well-pleased giggle. "I'm so pleased to find Sir Kenneth is disengaged for our dance on the roth. He has promised to come early. I sometimes think, dear Miss Hyde, that he is nowhere so happy as at Carolside among us all"—with a tentative glance at Aunt Pen sitting engrossed in her own thoughts.

"Are you expecting a large party?" she asked, ignoring the insinuation.

"Yes, indeed; half the county. We are so glad to be able to manage it during your visit, for I should like you to see my girls' first appearance."

"What are they going to wear on the occasion?" asked Aunt Pen abruptly. "In my time a first ball-dress was a matter of some importance."

Mrs. Hyde was delighted that Aunt Pen should interest herself in the subject. "White; both white. I like nothing so well for young girls. The most charming dresses, ordered at Madame Bing's, the first dressmaker in Burbeck; for Mr. Hyde insists on my sparing no expense. Madame Bing has exquisite taste, and she tells me the style she recommends will become both Flossie and Lou admirably."

"And Mona?"

"Mona! Ah, that's just it! The poor child has absolutely nothing suitable. Young men are so thoughtless about such things. She brought nothing but just a school wardrobe, and so careless with her clothes as she is! After two months you can imagine its condition."

Aunt Pen nodded gravely.

"So it's impossible for her to appear at the dance, as Mona and I decided this morning. It's a disappointment for the child, of course, but I've told her she may find a quiet corner in the gallery, out of sight, and see the fun from there."

"H'm. It seems a pity she should lose her pleasure for such a trifle."

"So it does. My girls are so good-natured that they would be only too glad to lend her anything if it would fit, but Mona is such a mite of a creature compared with them. And I'm sure, dear Miss Hyde, you'll agree with me that it's only befitting Mr. Hyde's position that Mona should appear properly dressed, or not at all."

To this Aunt Pen cordially agreed, and with a sigh of relief Mrs. Hyde felt that she had disposed of a difficulty.

V.

It was the day of the ball at Carolside. Lou and Flossie were contemplating with satisfaction the dresses lately arrived from Madame Bing, when Mona came running with a summons from Aunt Pen to go to her room at once.

"I believe Aunt Pen has something to show us, for I'm to go, too," said Mona, eagerly linking her arm in Lou's, as all three hurried along the corridor. She thought she had guessed rightly when Aunt Pen produced two morocco cases, which she handed to the Hyde sisters.

"A little present for you each to wear this evening," she said, kindly. "I hope you will like them."

In each case lay a handsome gold bracelet, every link set with pearls and rubies.

"Oh, aunt! How awf—how supremely beautiful!" cried Flossie in raptures, floundering among the polysyllables she thought Aunt Pen would prefer.

"Thanks so much, they're really quite too fetching—I mean—lovely," corroborated Lou, equally at a loss for words when deprived of her own language.

Mona was in ecstasies of admiration. Aunt Pen smiled at her raptures.

"And what about Mona?" she said presently.

"Ah, yes—Mona!" echoed Lou, always good-natured, and wishing that her cousin might share her good fortune.

"She must not be forgotten; only it seems she will not be at the dance?"

"No. I have no dress," said Mona, slowly; "but Dick and I are to look on from the gallery," she added cheerfully, for she was trying to put in practice Aunt Pen's advice to endure what could not be cured.

"Is dress the only obstacle? How would this do?" asked Aunt Pen.

She lifted the trunk of a box standing near, showing a mass of frothy white, interspersed with gleams of satin.

"Take it out, Flossie; Madame Bing promised to do her best, so I hope it will fit. Griffiths took her one of Mona's frocks as a pattern."

Mona gave one glance at the dress, and then, rather to the sisters' dismay, flew into her aunt's arms, and gave her a hug which tried to comprise the whole breadth and depth of her gratitude. Her present delight was the gauge of her former disappointment. Her cousins' satisfaction, too, was hearty and unfeigned, and both girls thanked Miss Hyde as warmly as though the gift had been to themselves.

"It will be ever so much jolli—more enjoyable now," said Flossie demurely. "And mamma will be so pleased." Aunt Pen, for her part, did not feel so sure of that, but was wisely silent.

"The presents shall be a surprise for her," she said. "Do not show them until you all go down dressed for the evening." The suggestion was voted excellent and adopted without hesitation, as the girls carried their presents away and bestowed them in secret. The happiness of the Hyde sisters was made complete an hour or two later, when a lovely bouquet of lilies and stephanotis and another of roses were carried to their rooms, having been left by a soldier-servant from Burbeck Barracks.

Dusk came at last, and at the earliest possible moment Mona, with beating heart, began to array herself. It had not occurred to her as even possible that she should ever possess a dress of such fairy-like fabric, and she scarcely recognised her own little person in

the long cheval glass. Snatching up the long white gloves which completed the gift, she flew off to Aunt Pen's room to thank her just once more. Miss Hyde put on her eye-glasses to inspect and admire—criticism was out of the question—while Griffiths, with an anxious face, put a few finishing touches.

"I think it wants this to make it complete," said Aunt Pen; and opening her dressing-case she took out a single string of pearls, which she clasped round Mona's throat. Mona, whose sole possession in the way of ornaments was a coral necklet of her mother's, was too ignorant to understand the worth of the rare old pearls, but she valued the kind thought of the giver, and her eyes were dewy as she turned to thank Aunt Pen with a kiss.

"It is like a dream!" she said; "a long, beautiful dream. Oh, Aunt Pen, do pinch me just to prove I am awake. How surprised Aunt Hyde will be! and—and Sir Kenneth!" Then a lovely blush mantled her cheeks, and her eyes grew dreamy. She said no more, but while Griffiths adjusted her ribbons her thoughts were busy wondering "Would he have missed me?—Will he ask me to dance?" Then, with a sudden humility, "Oh, how foolish to suppose he can think of me at all in such a roomful of people!"

The reception-rooms were brilliant with lights when Aunt Pen and Mona descended to the great drawing-room, just in time to find Lou and Flossie displaying their gifts.

The torch-bearing gods and goddesses upon the walls flung down the soft gleam of scores of wax candles upon the girls' pretty lace dresses, set off by the brilliant bouquets. Their mother looked as radiant as themselves as she admired the bracelets: here, at last, was a substantial earnest of Aunt Pen's goodwill.

"And here is another surprise, mamma!" cried Lou gleefully, drawing her cousin forward. "Doesn't she look pretty? and it's all Aunt Pen's doing!"

Yes; it *was* all Aunt Pen's doing, and Mrs. Hyde's complacent feelings towards her guest experienced a sudden change. It was just like the meddlesome old tabby to be always thrusting Mona forward. Why couldn't she let well alone? Mrs. Hyde was a good-natured woman. When once Sir Kenneth was safely secured as a son-in-law, and the Portpatrick coronet within her grasp, she was ready to plot and scheme for the little orphan cousin; but till these were well assured, every triumph of Mona's was gall and wormwood to Mona's hostess. She could have shaken the insignificant Cinderella transformed into a princess and the fairy godmother who had dared to work the change. It was too aggravating to see the little old lady erect and dignified in her black brocade watching, with satisfaction gleaming in her blue eyes, as Mona floated by with—yes—with the prince of the evening, Sir Kenneth himself!

For, oh bliss! oh rapture! he had espied her at once as she stood half-shyly in the corner by Aunt Pen's chair watching the

arrivals; he had rushed up with eager greetings, and though the first dance was dedicated to the eldest daughter of the house, Mona's doubts were soon put to rest, for in a moment her pink and gold programme was scribbled all over with bold K. Fs. After that she did not care much what happened. All the nice men she knew among her uncle's friends were asking her to dance, and here was good-natured Lou bringing others to introduce to her. Mona put down the names impartially, smiling upon her partners in her sunny way, but scarcely individualising them. She only knew they filled up the gaps between her K. Fs. The features of the evening were the dances with Sir Kenneth, and the spaces between them the Olympiads by which she reckoned time.

"Is your brother here to-night? Mrs. Hyde seemed rather to expect him," asked Sir Kenneth of Mona in one of the pauses of their dance.

"No; if he were it would be just perfect," she answered, reminded of this one flaw in her sphere of happiness. "But he may be here any day now, and when he comes we are going to keep house together."

"And leave Carolside? I shall owe your brother a grudge if he takes you away from us."

"Oh, no! I mean you and Jack to be the greatest friends. You must come and see him directly he arrives."

"I shall be most happy to make Mr. Jack Hyde's acquaintance," began Sir Kenneth rather stiffly.

"Not Hyde—*Tracy*," corrected Mona. "Jack is really only my step-brother."

"Tracy! is that your brother's name? And is he still in Paris?"

"Yes. Why do you ask?"

"Oh! only because a friend of mine, attached to the Embassy in Paris, is to be best man next week to a fellow named Tracy, who is going to marry a rich American. But his man's heir to a peerage, for they say the prospective coronet tempted the lady."

"So is Jack. At least he will be Earl of Portpatrick some day, unless his great-uncle marries, and he's ever so old already—ninety, or a hundred, I fancy. Although, of course, it can't be the same Tracy."

"Of course not," said Sir Kenneth hastily, and he quickly changed the subject. After all, what were other people's concerns to these two, who had a hundred things nearer home to interest them.

"Aren't Flossie's lilies lovely, Sir Kenneth?" exclaimed Mona, enthusiastically, as her cousin, upon the arm of her adjutant, passed the nook in the conservatory where she and her partner were resting after the *Distant Shore*. "Flossie always looks well when she is enjoying herself. And Lou's flowers are almost as beautiful. We guessed at once where they came from."

"And you have none! Just because you said so positively you wouldn't be here."

"Oh! I shouldn't have had any either way."

"How do you know that? As it happens, yours would have been larger and finer than any here. And now I have nothing to offer you but this."

He took a blush rosebud, fringed with maidenhair, from his button-hole, and held it towards Mona. "It is not like your cousins' flowers; but even a little rosebud can be eloquent sometimes, and this shall speak for me. Will you take it?"

She fastened the spray in her dress, blushing prettily as she met his eyes, so tender and so trustworthy. The presence of that little nestling rosebud made Mona feel unaccountably happier all the evening. There seemed not a cloud just now in all her radiant sky. Again and again she went back to Aunt Pen's corner just to tell her that everything was more beautiful and wonderful than she had ever dreamed possible, and to whisper gratefully: "It's all your doing, Aunt Pen!"

And the old lady would smile, well pleased, and then with a half-sigh wonder if the world would always seem as bright and beautiful to the blithe damsel.

The inmates of Carolside slept late next morning, and breakfast was served to everyone in his or her own room. Flossie had dreamed sweetly of her adjutant until the morning was well on, and neither she nor Lou thought it necessary to hasten their toilet.

Mona, for her part, was too full of excitement to sleep late, and it was not very long after her usual hour when she flung open her window to the morning air, fresh with the heather-scented breath of the moors. But she loitered over dressing, going over and over again in memory the blissful hours of yestere'en; and it was not far short of eleven o'clock when she took a carefully-preserved, but rather drooping rosebud from the glass of water on her dressing-table, and fastened it with tender touch at the throat of her dress. Then with leisurely steps she went downstairs, and passed out through an open window on to the verandah skirting the whole south side of the house. From a corner near the oriel window of the library, you could catch a glimpse of Falconscliffe Tower; and here Mona paused and leaned against the pillar of the creeper-covered balustrade, while her thoughts flew with a blush from the Tower to its master.

A bare quarter-of-an-hour earlier, Mrs. Hyde had joined her husband in the library, where he was languidly looking through the *Times* and in his secret heart agreeing with the Poet that "one of the pleasures of having a rout is the pleasure of having it over." His wife threw herself yawning into a large leathern chair, back to the window, and stretched out her hand for the pile of letters awaiting her upon

the table. Apologies, most of them, for non-appearance the previous evening, not so engrossing but that she presently heard her husband's sudden exclamation as he turned his *Times*.

"My dear! Here is news for you!—'The Earl of Portpatrick is lying dangerously ill at his Irish seat, Ballyrag Castle. The aged nobleman, who is unmarried, is in his 97th year.' This will bring Tracy home in double-quick time."

"Of course it will! How fortunate!" An amiable smile of maternal solicitude mingled with satisfaction overspread Mrs. Hyde's complacent features, as she mentally gazed into a sunny future free from the cares of chaperonage. "Dear little Mona," she mused, starting off in a train of thought at a pace which soon distanced her husband, who, being of slow perceptions, found himself, as it were, like a traveller left behind on the platform.

"How much I have enjoyed the dear child's visit! Mr. Hyde, we must ask her brother to join her here as soon as possible, and make his home at Carolside just as long as he likes—until, indeed," with a sigh, "he goes to settle down at Ballyrag Castle, for of course it will come to that.—And here I declare is a letter with the Tracy crest, in Jack's handwriting! No doubt announcing his return!"

She pounced upon it eagerly:

"DEAR MRS. HYDE,—I take an early opportunity of acquainting you with some news closely concerning my happiness, in which after your great kindness to Mona and myself I feel sure you will take an interest. I hope hereafter to have an opportunity of proving my gratitude" (Mrs. Hyde read on, smiling to herself), "but for the present the preparations for my approaching marriage—so hastily arranged—and for my visit to Florida with my bride, who is imperatively ordered back at once to her native climate, occupy me so completely that —"

Mr. Hyde, who had returned to his newspaper, was suddenly startled by a horrified exclamation from his wife, whose smiles had vanished and who was mingling with the phrases of the letter a lava-torrent of anger, indignation and annoyance in such confused vehemence of ejaculation that it was some minutes before poor Mr. Hyde could even gather the reason for the eruption.

Alas! for poor Mona, lingering on the verandah outside, so absorbed in her bright day-dreams that she never heeded the murmur of voices which came to her in buzzing monotone through the open library window, until one of them was raised suddenly, first to excitement, then to anger; and a name caught her ear, uttered in hard, rasping tones, she recognised.

The irate tones of Mrs. Hyde's voice could not fail to reach other ears than those for which they were intended, and so the barbed arrows of her wrath found their way not only to poor Mona on the verandah, but also to another unintentional listener in the ante-room upon the

other side of the curtain ; a little old lady this, whose blue eyes were flashing fiercely as she paused near the window, leaning on her ebony stick. Aunt Pen, too, had received a letter of importance that morning : a summons from her steward which would necessitate her immediate return to Redruthyn, and she was making her way to the library intending to announce this change of plans to her hostess when the sound of excited voices attracted her attention. She only arrived in time to hear the conclusion of Jack's letter, and to realise with a flash of reflected pain the blow it was inflicting on the poor little hearer outside.

"I am afraid little Mona will take my marriage very much to heart," Mrs. Hyde read on with hard voice and angry eyes ; "all the more as it must be so long before we can have her with us. Please break the news gently to my dear little sister. I don't know what is to become of her meantime ; the poor child won't like the idea of returning to school, and yet, what else can be done?"

Mrs. Hyde crushed the paper angrily together. "Break it gently indeed ! I shall do no such thing ! I've had trouble enough with that child already, though her ungrateful brother throws her over and makes a fool of himself without a second thought."

The soft breeze stirred the leaves of the creeper fringing the balustrade, which was rustling an accompaniment to Mrs. Hyde's denunciations ; but now another faint sound became audible in the verandah : the sound of a hushed footstep, the swish of a dress. The window near which Aunt Pen stood was darkened for an instant by some swiftly-moving object, as an indistinguishable figure flitted swiftly towards a shallow flight of steps close by leading direct to the shrubberies. A moment later Aunt Pen caught sight of a blue skirt disappearing among the evergreens.

Her heart went wistfully after the fugitive fluttering painfully out of sight, like a summer insect maimed and hurt by some careless hand. She was making up her mind to follow, when Mrs. Hyde's voice again surged into hearing, in answer to some remonstrance of her husband's.

"Jack Tracy expects that I shall keep her here ? Then I can tell you that he has reckoned without his host ! Back to school she shall go at once. I'll write to Fraulein Hirsch this very day."

"My dear," remonstrated her husband, "surely for appearance's sake we had better ——"

"Mr. Hyde !" turning upon him with a majestic anger which ought to have annihilated him upon the spot, "do you seriously ask me, a woman and a mother, to keep that chit here, a continual spoil-sport to ruin our girls' chances ? Are you so blind as not to see that already Sir Kenneth is beginning to be taken with her pretty face and insinuating ways ? to say nothing of the way in which she wheedles Aunt Pen ! But perhaps you consider yourself better able

than I am to think of the dear girls' welfare? Perhaps I had better leave things to *you*, as you're so wise and clever and so well able to provide for them!"

This last threat brought Mr. Hyde to his knees, as it were.

"My dear!" he began mildly. "I only ——"

"If you would only hold your tongue and not interfere, that's all I ask of *you*, Mr. Hyde. Now you'd better find Mona and send her here to me. The sooner she hears of her idiotic brother's behaviour, and things are put on their proper footing, the better for us all. Meantime, I'll write and tell Fraulein to expect her next week."

"You can spare yourself the pains, Mrs. Hyde," said a quiet, clear voice, as the *portière* was pushed aside, and there appeared in the space the spare little person of Aunt Pen. "I am obliged to go back to Redruthyn to-morrow, and when I leave, Mona goes with me to her father's old home, which—please Heaven!—will be hers now till she leaves it of her own free will. She is going to be the child of my old age—a daughter to me while I live, and (I may as well tell you now) my heiress when I die. Your children will get a thousand pounds apiece, neither more nor less—the rest will go to their cousin, my dear nephew Philip's child. You need not trouble to speak to Mona on the subject. She was on the verandah, and heard her brother's letter from beginning to end. Let her grieve over it in peace. I don't think there is anything more, except" (with a malicious twinkle of her bright blue eyes) "that I must thank you for your unintentional kindness to my *adopted daughter*. (Mona, I'm sure, is very grateful to you, for *she* has no idea that it was not disinterested.) Also for your own and your good husband's hospitality to myself. There's an end to business! Now I must go and comfort Mona—if I can!"

While the kind little old lady hastily donned her walking things and trotted through gardens and shrubberies looking for Mona, the poor child, wandering with uncertain feet among the familiar paths, heedless where she went, only longing to escape into solitude, hopped upon a little rustic summer-house, standing solitary among the pine woods, which seemed to offer a safe hiding-place. Its lattice windows were darkened with a tangle of creeper, its very steps were moss-grown. Mona lifted the rusty latch, and entering, threw herself upon a rustic bench and covered her face with her hands.

It was strange that in all her anticipations of the future the possibility of Jack's marrying had never presented itself to his little half-sister. The calamity which dispersed all her pleasant dreams had come so suddenly and demolished at one fell blow the airy castles so many months a-building. Jack had deserted her—Jack, who was all her world. Ah! rightly, indeed, was she named *Mona*—solitary—alone in her misery and sorrow, thought the desolate child as she crouched upon the dusty bench. Her pretty curls were all rumpled; no one would have recognised the blithe blue butterfly

in this woe-begone damsel, face to face with the first sorrow of her life.

A passer-by paused in astonishment before the half-open door. The sound of wild sobs coming from a place always dedicated to silence gave him quite an eerie sort of feeling. Was it the unquiet spirit of some departed Falconer bemoaning its former crimes? or vanished loves?

No; there was something too mortal and material about the sounds for such a supposition. It must be some human creature in trouble, and although an important errand to Mr. Hyde was taking him in eager haste by a seldom-used short cut from Falconscliffe to Carolside, Sir Kenneth, being a kind-hearted man, turned aside to inquire into the matter. As he recognised the familiar blue skirt and divined who was the wearer thereof, he felt that his philanthropy was rewarded. In a moment he was upon his knees upon the dusty floor, trying to withdraw the hands which concealed her face.

"Mona!" he cried; "my dear little Mona! Tell me what is the matter. I cannot bear to see you cry!"

Mona was past caring to conceal her grief. She could only turn aside her tear-stained face and try to free her hands, which Sir Kenneth was holding fast.

"No; don't turn away from me, Mona! Who has more right to know your troubles and cares than I?—I, who love you! There, it has come out! I meant to keep it to myself till I had your uncle's permission to speak, but now your tears have forced the secret from me. Mona! Give me the right to comfort you. Show you care for me by trusting me with your trouble. Is it anything so *very* terrible?"

As he knelt beside her pleadingly, his face was close to hers, where blushes were beginning to struggle with tears. It seemed only natural for Sir Kenneth to draw the weary little head to rest upon his shoulder, where the poor child managed to stammer out her grief. It did not seem to Sir Kenneth so very serious a one. He gave a relieved little laugh.

"Nothing worse than that, my darling?"

"Jack was all the world to me—until you came," sobbed Mona, with naïve self-betrayal, looking up through her tears into his eager face.

And this was the scene Aunt Pen came upon among the silent pine-woods.

It would have disconcerted many maiden ladies of her age, but not so Aunt Pen. She stepped boldly across the threshold and seemed to take in everything at a glance. Sir Kenneth gently loosed his hold of Mona, and rising, went up to Miss Hyde with more dignity than would have seemed possible under the circumstances.

"Miss Hyde," he said frankly, "I am a poor man; one who hitherto has had more of fortune's buffets than of her rewards. If

your niece were rich in friends and worldly goods, I should not dare to offer her a hand so empty. But if my hand is empty, my heart is full—very full of love for Mona—and she, I think, loves me a little—don't you, Mona?" reaching out his hand to her with a smile.

"Yes, Aunt Pen; I do love him," said Mona simply, putting her hand in his but hiding her face on Aunt Pen's shoulder.

Aunt Pen drew the little creature to her heart with a convulsive pressure; and with a pang the lonely woman realised that this latest treasure must also pass into other keeping and leave her solitary as before.

There was a moment's pause, while she struggled with herself and Sir Kenneth stood by waiting. Then Aunt Pen raised her head and met his wistful eyes.

"So let it be," she said. "You are good and true. Make her happy, as I would have tried to do."

She kissed Mona once, twice, thrice; then rising up—what was an old aunt's love to the child now?—she went away and left the two together.

It had seemed to Mona in the desolation of her first moments of lonely misery that she could never face her relations again. Stricken and wounded to the heart's core, the child dreaded alike her aunt's harshness, her uncle's pity, and her cousins' careless indifference.

But now a wealth of affection and tenderness had poured itself out upon the forlorn little maiden, and, fortified in the conscious strength of that rampart of love, she endured her few remaining hours at Carolside. On the morrow she travelled back with Aunt Pen to Redruthyn. Thither in a week's time Sir Kenneth followed, and together the happy lovers explored the wild Welsh hills and wandered by the brawling mountain-streams, which reminded them of the beck-side at Heatherburn, where they had first met.

Sir Kenneth deserted his own moors that season to shoot over the Redruthyn covers; but nearly two whole years passed, and the heather had time to fade and bloom again, before the child-like little betrothed blossomed into Lady Falconer. So much the pair yielded to their kind old friend's wishes and better judgment; and Mona has never had any reason to regret the lessons of wisdom and patience and self-control learned from Aunt Pen during that peaceful time.

Fortune still favours the brave. She smiles now once more upon the Master of Falconscliffe, thanks to the generous old lady whose goodwill he first won by his pluck in adversity. And one thing is certain: however "many years of happy days befall" them in the future, Sir Kenneth and his wife will always mark with a white stone the day which introduced them to Aunt Pen.

OUR LADY IN THE DRAWING-ROOM.

"GO somewhere south," said the kind old doctor after discussing our state of affairs. "It will be good for your chest; and, as you say, Marion wants a thorough change of scene and thought. Now where will you go?"

I did not know; all places were much the same to me, being all unknown. Dr. Bell ruminated for awhile.

"Have you ever been to Aumouth? No? Why not try that? My sister, Mrs. Paterson, lives just out of the place and could find you lodgings: just the sort of thing she likes. It is a nice mild place. They will tell you snow never lies on the ground, and the bay is like the Bay of Naples, and all the rest of the things they say about all the watering-places. Better go, and see into the truth of the statements."

So to Aumouth we went. Marion had just lost her lover, over a question of pounds and pence, and my chest came in very conveniently as an excuse for getting away from our neighbours. They, dear souls, took a benevolent interest in poor Marion's troubles, and made her feel more or less like a fly under a microscope. There would be no one to take the slightest interest in us at Aumouth.

It was dusk on a January day when we drove up to the door of our lodgings, and being thoroughly tired out with the journey from our own northern town, we sank very thankfully into the arm-chairs waiting for us by the bright fire-side. The landlady, all chatter and pleasantness, took charge of our effects, and presently sent up a hot dinner, perfectly dressed, the sight of which was most welcome to us.

Very drowsy and beautiful was the sound of the sea, and when we parted at an early hour on our way to the sleeping chambers it seemed to me that Marion's gloom was already yielding.

On the morrow we came down rested from our bed-rooms, which looked out to the back of the house, and broke into simultaneous cries of delight as we beheld the scene from the sitting-room window. An unclouded sky smiled down upon the living, glowing waters of the sea, upon the sandy beach and upon the folding hills across the bay. We threw the bow-window open to let in air that seemed to us quite warm and balmy.

Good Mrs. Frewen was satisfied with our enthusiasm; we were quite doing our duty by the beauties of the place thus far.

"Are there many visitors in Aumouth now?" we asked.

"Well, 'tis fairly full, ladies. You see, the barracks always make apartments let more or less well, though we have no season in par-

ticular like other watering-places. The officers have always families or friends or such-like. I am glad to say I have let my drawing-room from to-morrow ; only a week since the last lady moved out. Belinda is just putting the rooms straight, ready for the lady and her maid." Belinda was Mrs. Frewen's niece. "And what will you please to have for dinner, ladies?"

Anything would please us in this lovely place. We told Mrs. Frewen so, and she departed still better satisfied with us.

We went out to study the place ; in point of fact we almost lived out of doors these first few days, for the wind was out of the east and the sunshine was so bright that it was possible for us to sit for ten minutes together on the beach, or on the esplanade that skirted the bay for at least one mile in bare and undisguised ugliness.

We drove out also, but the country inland did not attract us ; January is not the month for admiration of rural scenery. It was better to dawdle by the sea and explore the streets of Aumouth, where time seemed to have stood still for a century. We tried to buy lace of native manufacture, but the price forbade it ; we tried to buy a parrot whose accomplishments included a perfect vocabulary of foul language, but the owner asked us fifty pounds. We retreated from that parrot pursued by oaths too terribly articulate, and thankful that it was not ours. We tried to buy a cloth jacket, to hire a sewing-machine and a piano, and, having come to the end of our resources, woke up one morning delighted to find that it was Sunday.

Mrs. Paterson had told us which church to attend, and we attended it. The rustiest of old vergers showed us into a seat and impressed upon us that if we were staying in the place it was our duty to hire sittings forthwith. We said we would see about it on the morrow, and settled ourselves comfortably in the high, narrow box that was ours for this one service.

The church was heated with gas, and was insufferably stuffy ; the singing was slow and not of the best ; the sermon, preached by the curate, was of so dubious a character as to make Marion gaze at me out of the corner of her eyes, and blush uneasily. I looked at the curate ; he might be twenty-five or forty-five, he would look the same at either age, and he delivered his appalling statistics and moralities quite unmoved. I looked at the congregation ; half of it tittered, half seemed hardened to the kind of thing. I became aware that in the pew next to us sat the officers from the barracks, who had drooped their heads and were giggling undisguisedly.

"I don't think much of Mrs. Paterson's taste," said Marion, as we wended our way back to our lodgings. "If she finds that style of sermon sufficient to the needs of her soul, her soul must be singularly constituted."

We tried the other church in the evening. The sermon was fifty minutes long, the preacher delivered it in a black gown, and for the

last twenty minutes had no waking auditors save Marion and myself. Then we decided to hire sittings according to Mrs. Paterson's recommendation.

Next day we roused up to a feeling of decided interest in the individuals who surrounded us. Sojourn in a watering-place always arrives at that result, sooner or later; nature's charms only fill our minds for a day or two, however enthusiastic we may be.

A good many of our neighbours were already known to us by sight. There was the stiff old military gentleman who made a regular constitutional on the esplanade, day by day, from that point to this and back again, accompanied by a lady, evidently his daughter. There was the sweet baby with the embroidered cloak and the French nurse; the man with the moustache and the black poodle; the old lady with the curls; and there was our fellow-lodger. Our lady in the drawing-room, Mrs. Frewen always called her, with almost as much reverence as if she had been a Madonna.

She was certainly a sweet-looking creature, young and innocent, if you may judge at all by the countenance; and to see her caress her babe when she encountered it in the nurse's arms was a charming sight.

"Here she comes," said Marion, as we stood by the window. "She has found a friend, too. I declare it is the young officer who laughed so at the sermon on Sunday."

"Old friends, perhaps," I suggested. "How pretty and confiding she looks, and much too young to be the mother of that baby. Do you know, Marion, I am sadly afraid that for all her meek looks our lady is a flirt."

"Oh, hush! You forget the existence of Mr. Cartwright."

"Not I. I was afraid that possibly our lady does. Mrs. Frewen tells me that he is an elderly gentleman; she has seen his photograph and seen the baby taught to kiss it."

"Which proves conclusively that you wrong the Madonna-like mamma."

"Who is now bringing her latest conquest into the house," I continued, as Mrs. Cartwright ran lightly up the steps followed by the officer, and, to my surprise, nodded gaily to us in the window.

"After this I think we will go out and see for that curate to come and spend a day with us," gasped Marion; and we put on our hats and went out, though not with that intent.

We walked out to Mrs. Paterson's, and she having business in the town, walked back with us after luncheon, to be picked up at our lodgings by her husband later on. Mrs. Paterson knew everybody; she told us the names and histories of all those whom we described to her, and stared as much as we did when we encountered our lady and her officer driving out sociably into the country.

Our lady nodded a recognition to us, and her companion raised his hat to Mrs. Paterson.

"Now who is that?" said she, stopping to gaze after the carriage. "I don't know her face."

"She is at Mrs. Frewen's, and her name is Cartwright—Mrs. Cartwright. You know her friend, apparently."

"Oh, yes, I know him well enough; Harry Golding—and a very nice fellow he is. A good, honest sort of boy. I must find out who this is, this young woman that he has picked up. Has she any other friends here, do you know?"

No, we could offer Mrs. Paterson no further enlightenment. We did not even know where Mrs. Cartwright came from, and were not at all sure that Mrs. Frewen did either. Meeting the babe on our way, Mrs. Paterson must needs stop to admire it and begin a skilful cross-examination of the nurse, who, however, seemed too stupid to impart much information. We rather enjoyed our friend's discomfiture; not precisely sympathising with her thirst for knowledge.

She got through her business—the deposit of certain club money in the savings-bank, the purchase of calicoes for village use, and ordering of books from the library, and we sat idling over our tea, when the object of interest returned from her drive. Both occupants of the carriage dismounted at our door, the gentleman paying the driver, as in politeness bound. We heard the lady's pretty protestations.

"Indeed you should not, Captain Golding. It is quite wrong that you should pay when you knew that I was going to drive out quite on my own account, without any idea of your accompanying me. You must let me pay you again. What, you won't? Then I must go by myself next time. You really will not come in? I must say good-bye then, for my darling baby will be crying for me. Good-bye; good-bye!"

Mrs. Paterson watched the parting interview with interest and lost no word or motion of our lady's.

"She is certainly pretty," she said deliberately. "She does not look as if there was much harm in her; but women are deep, my dears; women are deep. At least, some of them are. You and I are all right, of course. I fancy Harry Golding would have been just as well pleased if I had not been sitting in your bow-window when he brought his fair one back. Well, did you have Mr. Blackham or Mr. Philpot on Sunday morning?"

"It was the curate—is that Mr. Philpot? He is not handsome, and his eloquence is at least peculiar;" and we drifted on into discussion of all our Sunday's experience.

For a couple of days we watched our lady's proceedings, the innocent air with which she came and went with her cavalier, and then we met her in the entrance as she was going out. She stopped and spoke with the prettiest and most engaging air.

"Do you know, I have so longed to come and call upon you and bring you my baby to look at! Would you have been offended? Would you be offended if I did come in?"

Of course we should not. Do not all women dote upon babies, and were not we especially lonely? We should be charmed to see her, with or without the babe.

"Then may I come in now for just a little chat? Just ten nice friendly minutes, before I go for my morning's airing? Oh, what a nice room! You have been braver than I, I can see, and have put away some of Mrs. Frewen's choice ornaments. There is a green vase in the drawing-room that would make you shudder!—So you came here for your health? So did I. Mr. Cartwright was quite anxious because I lost my appetite—such nonsense, you know!—and he packed the baby and me off here for a fortnight, to see how it answered. Do I look as if I ailed anything, now?"

"You look charmingly well, and I hope are as well as you look, but it is pleasant to be so thought for and looked after."

"Oh, yes, of course, but it is just a wee bit lonely with only a nurse and a baby—not but what a baby is a great resource; I quite feel that I shall not be so really lonely now that I have spoken to you. Do you know the people next door, the Blackmores?"

"No, we have not heard the name. We have only one real acquaintance in the neighbourhood."

"As badly off as I am! That is the worst of going to a fresh place. Well, the Blackmores are residents—quite nice people—and they give a dance to-night. Not a formal matter—almost an impromptu affair—and they have sent me an invitation. It only came last night, and I have not sent in my answer, but I think, under the circumstances, as they are strangers and my husband is not here, I ought to refuse. What do you think?"

"It is a difficult question. We are strangers, too, you see, and can scarcely judge for you. Besides, we know nothing of the customs of the place."

"Neither do I. Perhaps it is quite the right thing to go to dances in this irregular way. But then, I have no clothes!"

"Ah, that settles everything. Well, never mind," said Marion kindly. "If you do not go you can have the satisfaction of watching the other guests arrive, just as we shall."

"Why, yes! That will be something," she cried with childish gaiety. "That will be very amusing. Now I must run away to order the mutton for my dinner and baby's biscuits; and I may bring baby in to see you sometime?"

"Please do. It will be a great pleasure to us," I said, as the little lady took herself away.

"How artless and childlike she is!" said Marion, watching her as she tripped along the pavement. "Mr. Cartwright really ought not to let her go about by herself; she is so much of a child that he should take better care of her."

"For which she might hardly thank him, perhaps."

Mr. Cartwright must have been easy-going indeed if he had

approved the way in which our lady came back at her dinner-hour accompanied by her gentleman acquaintance, who refused to come in, but waited at the foot of the steps as patiently as he might while she ran up to fetch a photograph; evidently her own, from the way in which he looked at it and deposited it in his waistcoat pocket. Two or three tender remarks passed between them, and then he walked off at a brisk pace.

A brilliant lamp was hung out next door that evening, and we put out our own light that we might the better observe the arrivals. Presently we heard the front door close, a figure wrapped in a warm cloak ran down the steps and across the road, disappearing in the darkness of the esplanade. We caught a vision of a sweet, innocent face, full of girlish glee, under the hood of the cloak.

"She has gone over to watch from the seat just opposite," said Marion. "She can watch from there with more security than we can. Is all the company coming on foot?"

Three or four gentlemen and a lady, enveloped in macintoshes and shod with goloshes, called forth this complaint; but now a succession of low and distant rumbling noises struck on our ears; they grew nearer and nearer, and, to our great amusement, bath-chair after bath-chair arrived and discharged its occupant at the Blackmores' door. We had never seen a lady in a ball-dress boxed up behind the glass of a bath-chair before, and it struck us as being irresistibly ludicrous when we beheld one after another uncased and handed out by her cavalier, equipped in macintosh and goloshes.

The last to arrive was Mrs. Paterson's friend, Harry Golding, who came across from the esplanade, evidently from an interview with our lady.

"Now I should think she will come in," remarked Marion. "It is getting much too wet for her to remain outside. Fancy her getting hold of him again to-night! I must confess that it seems to be coming it almost too strong."

Strains of music now arose from the house next door; we closed our curtains and waltzed round and round the room to the sound of our neighbours' piano and fiddle.

All the next day was spent on making an excursion into the country, for the rain had passed with the night and the morning dawned fair and promising. We saw and heard nothing of Mrs. Cartwright.

Next morning Belinda came to clear our breakfast-table, and we inquired anxiously for Mrs. Frewen.

"Oh, there's nothing amiss with aunt, thank you, ma'am," replied the damsel. "She is upstairs with our lady in the drawing-room. She has had bad news, and has to leave this morning all in a hurry, ma'am, and aunt is helping her."

This was sad indeed; we were full of pity for the poor little creature, and wondered what had befallen her: if, possibly, Mr. Cart-

wright were suddenly ill. We sent a message by Belinda, asking if we could help in any way, and received an answer to the effect that Mrs. Cartwright would come in to see us before she left.

The fly was already at the door when she came in, flushed and flurried, and with tears in her eyes. She closed the door before she began to speak.

"So kind of you to offer to help me, and I am in such trouble! Only to think," and the pretty, troubled face looked up at us touchingly—"only to think that my nurse has died suddenly, of heart disease; such a shock to poor Mr. Cartwright, you know! He is left with my delicate little girl, only two years old, on his hands, and has written for me to go at once. And the mischief is," here she lowered her voice, "I have not the money to pay good Mrs. Frewen. I know she was reckoning on getting my money to-morrow, for she has told me of some bills she meant to pay with it. I had written to Mr. Cartwright for some money, but in his trouble he forgot all that, or perhaps he thought I did not want it now. But the fact is——"

"Don't cry, dear," said Marion, consolingly. "You must keep bright and brave for your journey, you know."

"But you don't know all my trouble," she said, as she wiped her eyes. "I daresay you have seen me with Captain Golding?"

"We have," I remarked a little drily. Something, I do not know what, seemed to me to be a little crooked.

"It is very wrong of me, of course," she continued, plaintively. "I—I used to know him before I married, and I cared for him more than Mr. Cartwright would like to know of. So when I met him here quite unexpectedly, I could not help feeling a little bit pleased. But, you know, he isn't quite satisfactory; not quite what he used to be in the old days; and by borrowing ten pounds of me, he has put me in the most dreadful straits." She was quite tearful and agitated as she told her story, and now looked up to Marion, confiding and anxious as a child. "You said you would help me; could you, would you, lend me ten pounds to pay Mrs. Frewen and take me up to London? I would send it back in two days at the latest, if you dare trust me."

"Of course we dare, you poor child," my sister answered. "But do let this be a warning to you to be more careful in your actions. As the mother of two children——"

"I know—I know; you may trust me indeed for the future. How can I thank you enough for your great kindness? You have taken such a weight from my mind! Good-bye, you dear, kind creatures! This is my address. I shall never forget you—never!"

She kissed us both, ran out and had a whispered discourse with Mrs. Frewen. The cabman called to her to hasten; and in a minute or two our lady in the drawing-room had disappeared from our sight for ever.

"I do hope I was not wrong in lending her the money," said

Marion, toying with the card the little creature had left. "It is a very good address ; but I suppose people get into debt and forget it, even in Mayfair."

A certain delicacy kept us from discussing the money question with Mrs. Frewen ; and when Mrs. Paterson called, we only showed her our lady's card, without relating her history.

The morning's post brought no letter, but then we had never expected that it would. We were just dressed for an outing when our lady's friend came up and rang the door-bell. Seeing him, Marion and I drew back into our room, and waited.

There was a colloquy in the hall, and after a short time Mrs. Frewen flung open our door.

"If you are at liberty, ladies, this gentleman would like to speak to you. I must be seeing about my work."

Her manner was unusual, but so were the circumstances. The gentleman thus thrust upon us bowed, and we did the same.

I took up the parable.

"I suspect that you have come to us for news of Mrs. Cartwright, and I am sorry to say that we have none to give."

"It is rather information than news that I have come to ask for," he replied. "You are her cousins, I think?"

"And indeed I think that we are not!"

"But she told me you were. She said you were rather stiff in the back, and inclined to keep me at arm's length. But, for all that, you could not help being her cousins."

His look of bewilderment was delicious. Marion rippled out peals of quiet laughter. "I do solemnly believe that she has cheated me out of ten pounds," she said at her leisure. "But tell me, did you know her before this winter?"

"Never saw her till the other day. She dropped her handkerchief and I picked it up: that sort of thing has happened to me before ; but I never picked up a handkerchief for a prettier little lady."

"And she told us that you were an old lover, who had taken to bad ways since her marriage with Mr. Cartwright ; and had borrowed all her money, so as to make it impossible for her to pay the landlady without borrowing ten pounds of us!"

"But," he protested, "she borrowed twenty pounds of me, and I bet you anything that she has not paid the landlady now!"

"She gave me this address," began Marion, meekly.

"And she gave me this address!" cried he, flinging an old envelope down upon the card. The addresses did not correspond.

The loss of ten pounds was a serious matter to us, but for all that Marion and I sank down into our arm-chairs and laughed till we cried. Our visitor dropped on the couch and followed our example.

"Do you think that her name was Cartwright at all?" asked I as soon as I began to recover.

"Do you think that she has cheated Mrs. Frewen, too?" asked she.

"Do you think that it was a real baby that they used to carry out?" asked he.

And then, wretchedly out of pocket as we were, we all laughed over again.

It was too true. Our lady in the drawing-room had beguiled us all. Thirty-five pounds ten and ninepence halfpenny had she gleaned from the three parties chiefly concerned, and minor debts made themselves evident in course of time. She owed three-and-sixpence at one little shop for pickled beetroot.

We never knew if the baby was real, but think it was, because we remember that it certainly squealed.

The Aumouth adventure seemed at one time to be utterly disastrous, but just now we are veering in our estimate. Marion has become Mrs. Captain Golding, and I am spending a very happy Christmas with Mrs. Paterson and a nephew of hers who, oddly enough, rejoices in the name of Cartwright.



BELLS AT CHRISTMASTIDE.

RING, blessed bells, re-syllable the story

Dear to all children—we are such to-day ;

Tell how the Christ-child changed for gloom His glory,

Came and, most homeless, in a rude crib lay.

Clash out the anguish of Earth's troubled peoples,

Doubt and despair in all the jar be rife ;

Meet such a prelude from the sounding steeples—

Long night prevail'd before the Lord of Life.

Then, out of wrong, let right rise clearer, clearer ;

Dear silver mouths, your rapture on us rain !

Till to Earth's homes the Heaven of Heavens draw nearer ;

All feel the Peace and gracious pause to pain.

Ring on ! Ring on ! The story by your telling

Wins on the heart, as doth that far first year ;

Doubt dies away, again the Child is dwelling,

Dwelling with men to bring the Father near.

JOHN JERVIS BERESFORD, M.A.

